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JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

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SERMONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

BY

WILLIAM MALCOLM MACGREGOR, D.D.

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TO THE DEAR MEMORY

OF THESE TWO

SERVANTS AND FRIENDS OF JESUS CHRIST

DUNCAN MACGREGOR

MY FATHER

AND

ALEXANDER BALMAIN BRUCE

THROUGH WHOM, TO MANY AND TO ME ALSO

WAS DISCLOSED THE GLORY OF

THE SON OF GOD

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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THE MESSENGER AND HIS MESSAGE.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God is King!"—Isa. lii. 7.

WHAT lies behind these words is an imagination of Zion, once a queen envied and magnificent, but now a ruined, childless city, gazing with patient hopelessness along the road by which her sons were led away. The Jewish mind in that age was burdened with an oppressive sense of retribution. For generations, so great is God's forbearance, it had been easy to believe that iniquity did not matter. The earth was kind, and pleasure was sweet to the end for men who had well deserved to suffer. But, at the last, God, who is slow to anger, had forced in upon them the knowledge that iniquity does matter, and matters terribly. A storm of divine chastisement broke over the land, and when it passed there remained neither city nor nation; and, what was worse, it seemed as if God Himself had gone, and no portion was left to Zion but a slow misery and emptiness of heart. The city lay abandoned, briars covering the heaps of rubbish, jackals

making their lair in the halls of ruined palaces; and weeks stretched out to months and years, whilst the dumb complaint of desolation rose up to God; and, in this poet's fancy, the widowed Zion, sordid and uncomely now, grew faint with hope deferred.

Jerusalem is set about with hills, and on their edge the sentinels had often seen against the sky the spears and banners of invaders; but one day—and the heart thrills at the thought of it—one day the weary Zion shall see upon these mountains a courier, running like one who has great news to bring. Before he comes near enough to speak, the heart of Zion has divined the meaning of his haste, and hope springs up to meet him. And, as she waits for confirmation of her own surmise, it seems as if in all the world there could be no pleasanter sight than that tired runner, whose every movement tells that God, so long withdrawn, has come again in kindness. That is the occasion of the lyric outburst of our text—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that saith unto Zion, Thy God is King!" It is the rejoicing cry of one who has waited long.

Paul, for whom everything connected with his ministry had the colour of romance, caught at this phrase as descriptive of the Christian preacher. Sorrowfully it has to be confessed that, both for speaker and hearer, preaching has often been a prosaic matter of official duty and outward form; but all the more do we turn to the ideal of it, where eagerness is

seen on both sides because of the greatness of the theme.

1. What meets us first in the words is *an imagination of the hearer*. We are a race who wait; for the earth, with all its bounty, cannot hide from us the sense of something which has not come. The world is rich in kindness and in interest. We know the zest of work, we rejoice in the goodness of friendship, but not less do we find on everything some touch of elusiveness, as if it did not give us all that it promised. Something of every question remains unanswered, something of every hope is disappointed. Men are not to be taken too seriously in the account which they give of themselves; for, behind the show of contentment with life as it is and their preoccupation with work and society, there is something else which, in hours of naked feeling, is betrayed. There are longings in men of which they themselves are unaware, but at a word they leap into clearness. There are beliefs which slumber in "the dormitory of the soul" for years, but suddenly they start awake and take command of the life. There are men who have remained throughout a lifetime amongst low things, without the wish, without the power to climb; and yet, when the word of emancipation comes, it is welcomed with a childlike gladness, as if they too—these earthbound, secular creatures—had been waiting, like spirits in prison, for the word that should set them free. That is the unanimous witness of those who have worked for men; and it surely tells of a race born with eyes though born in the dark, with an

endowment wealthier than any use to which they yet have put it. We do not always know the direction in which the light is to be found, but experience teaches where it is not found, and many in the world are weary because of promises which have led to disenchantment. So many mornings have brought nothing; troubles and shocks which for a while have set the heart awake have brought us nothing. Of that we are well aware, but with the disappointment, there remains a deeper sense. This thing is not yet what our heart has asked for, but there *is* a word, there surely is a word, and when it comes how different life will be!

Men do not in the end believe that God has made the world a mere tangle of broken threads. In presence of suffering which seems wanton, they cling to faith in an effectual consolation. Though much looks vain and vacant, they do not conclude that there is substance nowhere. For that would mean that God makes puppets for Himself to play with, and that what is greatest in human life—the unconquerable faith, the beauty of mother's love, the chivalry of those who suffer for a cause—is all without sacredness to Him. Men do in the depths believe in God; and though His word has not yet found them, they believe that it will come and will be good. And that is what makes preaching hopeful; for the men, whom God has made, are waiting.

2. But next, in these lines we have *an imagination of the preacher*; and the figure needs little explanation which discovers the peculiar beauty of the messenger

in his feet. Other qualities a preacher may have, but in the eyes of needy men, this is first,—that he hastens. He comes as one who has something to say which his fellows will be glad to hear, and he is content that other gifts and commendations should be forgotten in that. "It is required of a servant," says Paul, "that he be found faithful;" and the preacher's first business is to see that he does not interpose anything of his own between his hearers and the good news which he has brought. As Dr. Denney says, he is not a diplomatist, free by negotiation to secure as much as he can of his proposals, but a herald; his business is not even to prove but to proclaim the gospel. Mr. Ruskin, in one place, distinguishes low art from high in this way: "In all base schools of art the craftsman is dependent for his bread on originality; that is to say—on finding in himself some fragment of isolated faculty by which his work may be recognised as distinct from that of other men. . . . But in all great schools of art an artist is praised not for what is different in him from others, but only for doing most strongly what all are endeavouring." That maxim touches close on preaching; for whenever a man thinks less of Christ and the men for whom Christ died, and more of what people look for from him, then self-exhibition begins, and the message is not declared. It is the feet which are commended.

That does not, in the least, mean that preaching is to be impersonal, a lesson taken over from another and repeated without any personal impress. Paul

often speaks of "my gospel," by which he meant the good news as the peculiarity of his experience had enabled him to see it; it is what Jesus Christ meant in particular to him. There is something more than suspicious in the ministry of one whose sermons might be anybody else's, who has not words of his own, and aspects and visions of his own. What gives vital energy to preaching and gives it power and impact is that the word should have a life behind it, that the gospel should have taken shape anew in the heart and thought of a believing man. My Christ cannot be all the world's Christ; and yet the sense that Christ is real and overmastering to the man who speaks is the best possible commendation of Him to the multitude of widely sundered men and women who listen and who need. "What we have seen and heard declare we unto you"; and though life may have led you in other directions, the message is of a salvation great and various enough for all.

The preacher is set between two constraints which may seem to impel him in opposite directions. On the one side is the necessity of the poor souls who wait, with ignorance and obstructions of their own. Some have not heard, and many have heard so badly that their minds are now encumbered with prejudice and misapprehension and dislike, so that each needs to be persuaded in a manner of his own, and the preacher is driven to seek about for means. He has to come down to the ignorance and slowness of men, he must try to see inside their minds and talk in their many dialects.

He may have to keep something in reserve, making use of half words until he is free to use whole words; and in all this he is following the example of his Lord. He must become all things to all men, although in so doing the temptation waits for him of meeting men half-way, and modifying the message which he bears.

But there is another constraint, which comes in to keep him right. "How shall they preach," says Paul, "except they be sent?" They are sent; their business is Christ's business, and success crowns them when Christ and men are face to face. If we know what salvation is and what human sorrow is, we shall always find pleasure in the thought of the wideness of the proclamation. Much preaching, it is true, aims at nothing and achieves nothing; but in every kingdom under heaven to-day tired souls are being cheered by gifts and messages from the Son of man. No circumstances can wholly hinder that, no calamity crushing the heart, no long habit of evil, no oppression of work or frivolity of mood; the Lord, who is rich towards all, has His own ways of speaking to the hearts of His creatures. And wherever He speaks impossible things are done; comforts arise in the midst of distress, order and quietness come into the life of hurry, and men grown hopeless are cheered by the assurance of redemption. Hearts grow simple, evil men get clean desires, selfish girls come to know the dignity and sacredness of life; these are the works of Jesus by His word. And it is because of them that men have reverenced the office of the messenger. In him there

may be infinitely much of fault and ignorance, for "the treasure is in earthen vessels." But the message, and He who sends it, and the universal need, will ever make the office great; and a man with a heart for the work will always be a cheering sight in the distressed world of men.

3. Finally, the text offers a suggestion as to *the character of the gospel.* "Many things are true and, on occasion, salutary and important, which are not, in strictness, gospel." One great mission preacher says, "I remember how my heart grew hot as one speaker after another stood up and spoke about the wages of sin and the like, but I heard no gospel preached. These stern truths were not to be forgotten, but other things needed to be said first." The very word gospel—good tidings—suggests the need of variety in presentation, for the conditions of life may have driven men into an attitude in which what is good tidings for others may seem too light and sanguine for them. Here, in the poet's mind, is the image of this despairing, forsaken city—what kind of word does she need to raise up her heart and make the world about her new? Here are men whose life is spoiled because their hearts are sullied and they cannot recover cleanness, what word can change their mood? Here are women whose days are one long ache, what word can give them light enduring? A gospel must be judged by the situation, and if the trouble is deep it must be deeper yet. It must be *good* news to make the mourner sing for joy, and it must be good *news* that does not affront the

ancient troubles of the heart by the sense that it has been heard before. Paul reports that to him the gospel came as marvellous and unprecedented as the first birth of light; "God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, hath shined in my heart." It is an almost magical thing—light for eyes long sealed in darkness, confidence for men who have groped and guessed, hope without a limit for those whose days are drawing in. That is everywhere the character of the gospel; and in our hard age it is very needful that men should labour to secure in preaching "a strong infusion of those elements which make a gospel."

The prophet fancied that the best news which he could bring to troubled men was the assurance that "God is King." He uses other words—it is good tidings of good, of peace, of salvation, but what these all lead up to, and where they leave the mind is this—thy God is King. It had seemed as if God had withdrawn Himself from Israel and from the world, and life was left without a plan; neither from the fortunes of their nation nor from their lot as individual men and women could they gather the assurance that He cared. Wave after wave of trouble had gone over them. They knew that they had sinned with their fathers, but it seemed as if on them had come the gathered burden of that ill desert. It was an age of good intentions. They meant to do well, and looked back with abhorrence on the excesses of Manasseh's time; they sincerely wished to stand right with God, but it made no difference. They were left to themselves,

weak men in the sweep of the rapids, and their cry seemed to find no answer.

But now, in a single incident, there came the assurance for which they had waited; it was a bare fact in history, a change in imperial policy towards a subject race. The king of the East, who had held the people captive, was now to let them go. A bare event! —Yes, but in that event they caught a sight of God, which made the whole world new. Care, doubt, fear no longer could oppress them, when they saw that God had interposed, for that meant that God had forgiven. The burden which had lain upon their heart—the sense of ill desert, of isolation, of exposure—now fell away at the tidings of this great event, which assured them that they had a Friend, and that He was pacified towards them.

> "No cloud across the sun
> But passes at the last, and gives us back
> The face of God once more."

To get back the face of God—to know that He who is righteous and who cannot look on sin, is our Friend, that He cares and will protect, that is to receive the gospel.

In what is essential, men of to-day are near of kin to those of Zedekiah's age. There is among them little actual aversion from good, and there is a great deal of a sort of helpless good intention. People mean to be kind and honest and clean, but their intentions do not always find effect. They blunder and the

blunder remains; they lose their freshness and cannot recover it. And troubles come, bitter and blinding. Friends talk to them in ways of consolation, but it is all words, for when they stretch out their hands in the dark no hand grasps theirs. What they need above all else is the assurance, coming home to them with unchallengeable force, that God is alive and King, that He can turn back the course of a life and give a man a new heart, that He is able to make men quiet and strong in any sorrow. That assurance still comes in the form of an event, an episode in history, which is covered by a few phrases in the Creed: He was born of Mary the maiden, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, He was crucified, dead, and buried, He rose again on the third day. It is a record of events which the secular historian is called on to attest, but over all the world it has brought to men the assurance that God is King. From these plain facts, history itself has received a new dimension, for it is no longer the narrative of the energy and contrivance of dead men, but here God is at work, counting men worthy of His attention, entering into human life, and there making sacrifice of Himself. It often seems as if He did not care for our good intentions, but here we find the measure of His concern; "God *so* loved the world," it is written. And hearts that have drowsed and grumbled—conscious of fault but finding no escape from it—have started broad awake at the witness of this fact, and have left their sin behind; and men

grown spiritless because no one cared, have kindled up their courage, and gone to be the messengers of hope to others, because of this living love of God. There is no true preaching except that which Paul has named "the word of the Cross," for in it men gain assurance as to what is in the mind of God. And it is God we need to meet; not Jesus of Nazareth, a gracious and winning figure in history, but the very God in whose hands our life is. We need to see clearly not in the pleasant fields of Galilee, but in our perplexed life to-day. Peter, that great lover of Jesus, yet says of his Master—"Through whom ye do believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." It is God we need to come at, to know that God is King. Nothing makes the world new for a man like the assurance that God sees, and God cares, and God controls. That is to get back the face of God again.

And so the world of men has been cheered in age after age by the tidings borne across the centuries of this tremendous incident, in which all of God, the Unchanging, is revealed. When rightly told, it is ever a word of good news; and in all ages no spectacle has appeared to troubled men more welcome than the messenger who tells of Jesus Christ. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that saith unto Zion, Thy God is King!"

GLADNESS IN ALL TENSES.

"Abraham exulted because he was to see My day, and from where he lives in God he has seen it and rejoiced."—JOHN viii. 56.

THIS is our Christmas time. The children are gathering home, gifts pass to and fro, and friend remembers friend. It is a season of good fellowship, when kindly thoughts abound. What word is wholly apt about our faith at such a festival? Not, surely, such as would rebuke or scare the joy of children, but rather such as would deepen it, and make it more enduring. For joy is more than that light-heartedness which withers at the touch of trouble. The true joy is a grave thing, and remains undimmed through long experience of pain, so that men who have had their share of trial come to the end with hearts serene and glad as any child's. That securer brightness is a gift of our Lord to His friends, for He so greatly loved children that He wished His people to grow old without losing the child's heart. He sheds gladness all about Him; in old times men rejoiced in the assurance that He was on His way, and those to whom He came rejoiced that He was with them, and men and

women, after nineteen hundred years, rejoice to-day in every thought of Him. Thus there is gladness in all tenses, and it is of that I wish to speak.

1. There was gladness whilst He was still to come. "Abraham exulted because he was to see My day." He lived in a time of dim star shining, when little could be clearly seen, but that obscurity was not able to restrain him. By such light as he had he felt his way, going wherever God seemed to point. His life was full of ventures, in which he cast himself upon the things which God kept hidden in His hand. He left his home, although he knew not where another settlement might be found; he refused the chance of wealth, leaving to Lot the richer lands, although he could not yet define what better thing awaited him upon the upland pastures; he took his late-born boy and laid him on the altar, though hope was dying in him all the while. His characteristic posture is that of one engaged with to-morrow and the things which God may yet bestow, more than with the secure possessions of to-day. People called him "The Hebrew—the man from the other side of the River," a name which surely was appropriate for one who resolutely flung himself and his fortunes out beyond each obstacle in turn, committing himself in God's name to what lay on the farther side. He did not grumble because his light was dim, but rejoiced that fuller light was on its way; and the more resolutely he cut himself off from the past the more was he possessed by the assurance of what was coming.

No one need imagine that Abraham, in any definite way, anticipated the manner of Christ's advent. Amid the pompous formalities of the worship at his home he had somehow caught a glimpse of the wonder of God's presence; and what drew him out from the entanglements of home and kindred, and led him on from stage to stage of journeying, was the hope of seeing more of God. He did not know or greatly care whither he might be led. He trusted that, wherever it might be, God would be there; and like an adventurer in search of kingdoms, who embarks upon the bosom of a river and lets it bear him on beyond his knowledge but not beyond his wish, so Abraham went seeking for fuller intimacy with his God. And all the time there was no desolating sense of giving up, for life lay in front, and he followed joyfully. "He exulted," says Jesus, "because he was to see My day."

Abraham stood in that for all his dispensation. Throughout the Old Testament we see a people always meaning more than they can clearly tell. To Abraham himself the promise was given, "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed;" and thus while kings and churchmen builded as for their own nation, an obscure sense was at work within their minds constraining them to keep a place for the stranger coming in. Every to-day had hanging about it some hint or promise of to-morrow. Every sacrifice was incomplete—a sanguinary spectacle—except as faith and penitence reached out towards Something more effectual; every prophetic message is haunted by dim figures of

coming good. "God's manifestations are not sudden," says A. B. Davidson; "outposts and skirmishers precede the array of the Lord of Hosts. No great creative act is isolated, it is typified; it projects dim shapes of itself; it realises itself in a lower form. It struggles towards complete embodiment, rising through hindrances into imperfect forms, till it reaches perfection." And throughout the process it was not to-day alone that men rejoiced in but to-morrow, a good which was about to be revealed, a gladness which would for ever banish gloom. Often they could not put in words what it was they sought; but they felt that when they came to it they would recognise it, and would know how good it is.

The story of the Wise Men suggests that the same yearning was present beyond the boundaries of Israel. These men lay, like Abraham himself, in deepest shadow, but their heart was towards the day: "And when they saw the star," we read, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." In that they are not alone; for in India and China to-day we hear of men who have never learned, but who are feeling and seeking after God, and whose desire is kindled at the very name of hope. "To those who worship God," says Ruskin, "and have obeyed the laws of heaven written in their hearts, and numbered the stars of it visible to them—to these a nearer star may rise and a higher God be revealed." We must not think that all the wonders of God's ways are written in His Book, since there are many for whom the Sun of Righteousness has

not yet risen, but who are conscious that a new day is coming and are longing for it.

And mark Christ's claim: He says that all these obscure anticipations in Jew and Gentile, these brave efforts after something better than they knew, were efforts after Him. "He was the brightness of innumerable lives and the sweetness of innumerable sorrows, when He was but the expectation of longing Israel." Ages before men saw Him face to face, some were cheered and fortified by the far-out sense that He was on His way. For even the distant thought of Him has gladness in it.

2. That of men's forecast but now of their recognition; gladness is in every tense, and from the future we come to the present.

The indignant Jews had counted Jesus presumptuous for saying that if any man would keep His word he would never see death. Why, they cried, Abraham is dead and the Prophets! and Jesus answered—Abraham dead? He rejoiced because he was to see My day; he broke from off him ties of home, possessions, kindred, and threw himself out on this quest for God. His whole life was an aspiration and a desire, burning up to God like a pure flame, and you think that that brave spirit was quenched and came to nothing! You think he died! I say he lives; he rejoiced because he was to see My day, and from where he lives in God he has seen it and rejoiced. That is a great imaginative suggestion. These clear eyes, purged from the error and the self-seeking of earth, saw the mystery accom-

plished when the Word was made flesh. Peter, speaking of the Gospel, says that the angels desire, bending down, to look into it; and in Luke we read of the angels bursting out into sight as they proclaimed this mystery of glory and goodwill. I cannot dwell on that; but it is here in the text—"He saw My day and was glad."

We cannot in our reading of the Gospels miss the continual note of gladness amongst those who saw Him in the early days. Treat these opening chapters as you will, you cannot take from out of them this character of joy at our Lord's coming. Before He had done or spoken anything, men's hearts were big because of Him. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour," says Mary. "In the tender mercy of our God," sings Zachariah, "the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to shine on those who sit in the shadow of death." "Behold," says the angel, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." "The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God." Simeon blessed God because his eyes had seen God's salvation. And so it goes, through these extraordinary chapters, a frank outburst of song because of the coming of this little Child.

And when we travel farther, the note is not changed. "We have found the Messiah," says Andrew; "We have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write," says Philip. We have *found* Him. There had been a seeking and expectation of many generations, and hearts had sometimes failed for longing, but that was at an end. We had hoped for great things,

for everything from our God: we looked for help, for guidance, for pardon, for victory, and the sky over us was many a time like brass. Our voices went out into the vast inane, waking no echo or reply, as, in our unbelief, we dreamed. But He is here—Emmanuel, the very God! No longer remote, inaccessible, tremendous, but near, familiar, in fashion like ourselves. No wonder they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Not everyone who saw was glad, for the eyes—or rather the mind that lies behind the eyes—may be so perverted that they cannot see.

> "What was it ye went out to see,
> Ye silly folk of Galilee?
> The reed that in the wind doth shake?
> The weed that washes in the lake?
> The reeds that waver, the weeds that float?—
> A young man preaching in a boat."

At every stage in the history this mask of insignificance was drawn over Him. The shepherds and the Wise Men saw a tiny child of peasant folk, and many who met Him later, saw nothing in Him that they should desire Him. That frank goodwill, that readiness to spend Himself for others, that discernment of hearts, that confidence and joy in God—these had no attraction for many; so it is written that He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not. Their hearts were set on objects too ambitious and too unspiritual. But to those who were seeking truth, and seeking it truly, to all the simple and lowly and teachable, He was revealed. "We know," says John,

"that the Son of God is come." That was enough; for it meant that the great God had heard their prayer and had come to their help. They did not need to wait for any performance, but when their eyes rested on Him they were content. We have found Him, they said, and they were glad.

3. And now, in a word, of those who look back, and who rejoice as they remember Jesus of Nazareth, born of woman, a true man with men. As the world has travelled on, the witness of those who remember has been constantly enriched. Isaiah declared the programme of Christianity to be—"to preach good tidings to the poor, and the opening of their prison to those that were bound, to comfort all that mourn, and to proclaim the time of God's good favour;" and all who have spoken of Jesus, with any fitness for the task, have taken it as their business to bring to discouraged and over-anxious men some gift of cheer. Wherever this gospel has penetrated men have begun to give witness, not from others but from themselves. I saw Jesus, one says, and my heart acknowledged Him as sent for me, and He has made me a cleaner, stronger man. Any good that is in me has come from Him and from those who lived with Him; and any sullenness and shadow that are in me are due to my withdrawing myself from Him.

There has been abundant perversion of the Christian faith, but one fact, I think, is significant, that whenever there has been a quickening of interest there has been a fresh outburst of song. Almost all revivals have

had that as an accompaniment, for when men really see Jesus their joy is so vivid and so unprecedented that it strains for utterance of its own, and the common words and phrases all look withered. Some of Wesley's preachers sang their way across England, as little inclined to fasting and long faces as Jesus' own disciples were. The children of the bride-chamber cannot fast, says Jesus, when the bridegroom is with them; so joy goes with them everywhere. Certainly they need some fount of gladness, for sorrow and perplexity confront them. There are such wrongs, such darkness, such reluctance; the truth, if it does make way, makes way so slowly. But those who have seen their Lord are kept in a strong content. They see the world's need of Him, but they also see how He answers all that need; and with patient hope they anticipate the day when the long resistance and denial shall break down. Like Abraham, they rejoice because they are to see another day of the Son of Man, a day of revelation and of mastery, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

FORECASTS.

"He was the brightness of innumerable lives and the sweetness of innumerable sorrows, when He was but the expectation of longing Israel."—FABER.

THE NEW COVENANT.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; and they shall no more teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know Me from the least unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."—JER. xxxi. 31, 33, 34.

"IN that he saith a *new* covenant he hath made the first old; but that which is becoming old is nigh unto vanishing away." That is the comment upon this passage of a New Testament writer, who saw in it a virtual condemnation of the religious system in which the prophet had been brought up. That system had antiquity on its side; the claim was made that, in substance, it dated back to Moses, and Sinai with its terrors of divine manifestation lay behind it; how did Jeremiah come to shake his mind free, and to pronounce upon it as a system that had failed? In his early days such a judgment might have been

pardoned, for then the popular religion was base enough. Every district had its shrine at which the country people worshipped greatly at their ease, with just such revelry and licence as their heathen neighbours used, and there was hardly a chance for nobler thoughts of God. But the scandal of that condition grew upon the minds of serious people to such an extent that the king, Josiah, backed by a group of pious courtiers, was emboldened to put in force a new law under which sacrifice was forbidden outside of Jerusalem. It was an act of extreme daring, as the people clung to the familiar high places, and it had to be carried through in face of their mutinous grumblings; but the reforming party was resolute, and worship, for the time, was lifted out of the mire, and made high and stately and clean.

That was not only a reformation in morals, it helped men's thoughts of God, for everything in the worship now combined to give the impression that Jehovah was a great and a holy God. Jeremiah had indulged hopes about this movement, but, as years ran on, he grew more and more uncertain if anything substantial had been attained. In his own life he had been learning what God is to the heart which welcomes Him; and when Jehovah said in the covenant, "I will be your God," the saying which his neighbours took without a question seemed to him tremendous. Our God? Yes, of course, they said; every child among us knows that He is the God of Israel, just as we are His people. But to Jeremiah there was no, of course! His nature

had not room to contain the idea which they received so lightly: my God! It is a word whose dimensions are every way infinite,—wisdom unsearchable, truth which outlasts the strongest things on earth, a strength by which the stars are held in place, a kindness without limit to weak and broken men, these are contained within its compass, and they are mine if He is my God. And all these offices in the Temple, the sacrifices, the washings, the coming and going of priests, did not by one whit advance him in that deep knowledge of God. But that was not all; when he looked out upon the nation as the great movement of reform had left it he was perplexed. The official churchmen were exuberant, as they always are when outward things are prospering; the purifying of worship had removed temptations to excess, and thus the national life was, in a measure, cleaner than before; but were the people themselves different? They worshipped in this new fashion because the law required it, just as they had worshipped in other forms when that was allowed. But their life was without depth or inwardness, and it seemed a mockery for them to say, "Jehovah is our God!" for He is a great God, and the deep places of the earth—and of the heart—are all His own. The covenant ran, "I will be your God and ye shall be My people;" we have claims on each other, and all that each has is the possession of the other; and to the sad eyes of the prophet it looked as if the covenant had not yet been established, and as if, after so many efforts, men had still to discover some footing

on which Jehovah could be to Israel all that *God* means.

That is not a perplexity of any one generation. In every Church there is something to approve—an outward correctness of morals, some tokens of reverence, some movement of desire after good things; but whenever a man looks closely the question revives, Is God known in this place as *God*? That awful, awful Name, that Name of power and majesty and illumination, that Name which has changed the face of life for thousands, do we even faintly guess at what it means? or is the promise of the covenant unfulfilled which says, "I will be your God"? That is a grave question, and Jeremiah, who had fallen into disfavour at court, took it as an unsolved problem into his hiding-place—Why is it that, a promise having been given to a nation, it is only fulfilled in the experience of a few? He laboured in his retreat at that question, and when he was free to show his face again, he felt that he had found his answer.

To us that answer may not seem new, but when it first was published, it was a daring innovation. It declared that all the time given to the task of amending religion on the side of its observances had been wasted. We have been talking and acting as if the controlling question were—In what place should God be worshipped? or according to what rule? But I see that the day is coming when these things will sink into their proper insignificance, and greater questions will be asked. If God and man are to come together

as friends it must be on the footing, not of anything outward but of what is inward. Thus Jeremiah made a place for evangelical religion six hundred years before Jesus was born; but few people, even yet, are evangelicals at heart, and his word is never obsolete.

1. The first point in his answer is that, if the covenant is to be effective, all must know God for themselves. He sets aside the host of priests and teachers, and intermediaries of every degree, and brings men sharply face to face with God. "No man shall teach his brother, saying, Know the Lord."

Now in every age men have preferred to take their religion at second hand. In Israel, religion was mainly a national concern; God's relation was to the people as a whole, and every Israelite, however indifferent, shared in the benefit. The priests discharged their daily office which kept things right for all, and a man needed only to perform some small ritual duties to keep himself in connection with the system. He did not need to be what we call a religious man himself; for if he observed certain occasions of feast or sacrifice, and followed certain rules of life, the system did the rest. That is the notion which arises wherever there is a priesthood, for the priest is one who manages your religion for you, going where you cannot go, and touching mysteries which are beyond your ken; and the efficient power is the mysterious grace of God, which resides in the Church as a whole, and which blesses all within the Church who comply with its external demands. Most people are lazy, and welcome

the relief of a notion like that, and yet it is entirely alien to the religion of Jesus. It is commonly with strain that religion takes possession of a man's life, and it is with strain that it can be maintained, vital and uncorrupted. To see God for oneself, to open up the mind for the reception of His thoughts, to be exposed naked to the penetrating light of His presence, to lay upon one's heart the burden of the divine requirements—that is never easy; and the craven heart of man welcomes any expedient by which it can be avoided. To observe the ritual of religion, to take interest in the outward fortunes of a Church, or in discussions about its doctrines—these may be nothing else than expedients by which men conceal from themselves the fact that they are not religious.

Especially in any scheme of Church life in which the sermon has a very large place, it may constitute a real danger. For it is easy whilst you agree or disagree, whilst you enjoy or criticise, or dissent, to imagine that you are actively engaged with religion, whilst you may never come in contact with the reality of it at all. Just as in reading history, you may be mastered by the vividness and brilliance of the writer's account of events. At the touch of his genius they come out of a dead past, which itself is far beyond your sympathy, and for the time these things do live, these people move and fascinate you. But when the book is returned to its shelf, the shadows fall, and the men and women and their fortunes, which have arrested you, grow blank and dim. You are not interested in

that period after all, you simply know that the subject can be made interesting, which is a very different matter. You go to a lecture on the manners and customs of the spider, and whilst it lasts you listen with all your ears, for the speaker knows his trade. But not one in ten of those who were interested will ever read a book to push their study farther, or even stand for ten minutes the following summer to watch a spider laying its trap. What engaged them was not the subject but the lecturer's account of it; and the reception of preaching is not greatly different.

The clearest mark of the new order of things, says Jeremiah, is that religion shall henceforth be taken at first hand. Jesus said, "Have salt in *yourselves*;" do not be dependent for what keeps life strong and wholesome on influences outside of you. The religion which is worth anything is not what is told you but what you know of yourself. That does not mean that there is no room for teaching. Paul's understanding of what is contained in Jesus Christ is richer and more subtle than any of us could for himself have attained, for Paul had a surer insight and a more burning love. But if you know only what Paul says and have no answering knowledge in yourself, even Paul will help you little. A man may be a heretic in the truth, as Milton says; and "if he believes only because his pastor says so, or because the assembly so determines, without knowing other reasons, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy." It was proclaimed by Joel that God would one day pour out of His Spirit

upon all flesh, even upon the servants and the handmaidens; for it is God's intention in the covenant that nothing in station or in lack of education or opportunity should hinder any man from knowing God for himself. The motto of all our faith is, "With open face."

2. Jeremiah's other assertion touches on morals as the first touches on religion. All the moralists of his time believed in rules, and indeed it is seldom that a professional moralist escapes from that snare. The condition in which Jesus discovered the law in Israel moved Him to indignation, and yet things had come to that pass in a perfectly natural way. First of all, there were the sacred Ten Words, then there were applications of these to the variety of actual situations, and rules were heaped on rules so that a man need never find himself without a guide; and the end was that men, whilst breaking no rule, were yet not good. The outcome of casuistry, in the strict sense of the word, as the detailed moral guidance of men, is always the same; there is room for obedience without virtue. A man complies with every precept and yet remains a very poor creature, whilst his neighbour who breaks the rules at every turn is trusted and beloved; for it is not the absence of fault which gives worth to any performance but the presence of some quality. Milton talks with scorn of the man who, in writing poetry, needs to count the syllables. That can be done, and verses can be knocked together by a sort of laborious carpentry, and those may like them who can. Rules

have their place; but a man will never make himself a gentleman by the most sedulous study of a book of etiquette, and a son will never, by the most dutiful performance, blind the eyes of her who only asks his love. No *almost* can ever mount up to the dignity and the spontaneity of the thing itself. In poetry, in courtesy, in affection, in character, it is something within a man which is controlling; and he does not begin to make progress until his heart is gained for the work.

Few things in the Gospels are more astonishing than Christ's refusal to lay down rules for His disciples. They were ignorant and unlettered men, but He gave them no detailed guidance as to worship, as to behaviour, as to the constitution of the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name," He said, "there am I in the midst;" and with that promise He threw upon them the burden of the perplexities as to modes of worship. "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," He said; "whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" that is, on the manifold questions of conduct and of duty I bid you judge for yourselves, for I will not settle them for you; only if you seek My Spirit I think you will judge securely. He swept away laws, says Seeley, in order to make of them a new race of law-makers. A man who could only do what he was told had little attraction for Jesus, who wanted men with courage and instinct to see their way, able to do what had not been done before, and to anticipate His mind in new con-

ditions. Many are ready to follow a lead, liking to be told what to do and to see a limit marked for their observance, forgiving seven times, like Peter, and then being done with forgiveness; but Jesus asked for men who, on occasion, could give a lead, and who would never be ashamed to stand alone.

That is what Jeremiah meant by having the law in one's heart. It implies a kind of instinct of the will of God, by which a man can guide himself apart from distinct directions, some better sense of what is noble in conduct. It means that God's will should not only be our law but our will, so that we can do the right with a kind of elation, like that brave poet who sang, "I delight to do Thy will, O God." And the prophet saw that, for want of obedience of that sort, the covenant could not stand.

3. So much of criticism, but what had Jeremiah to offer by way of suggestion for amending what was faulty? It is easy to say, you must begin at the heart; but how is the heart to be awakened? And the prophet answers in a word: "I will forgive your iniquity." The remedy must come not through any human effort but from above.

That is a mere hint, but it is of profound significance. The trouble in every religious system which fails is that it does not bring men close enough to what God really is, and there is no regenerating virtue in bowing before a formless mystery. There must be revelation, and the revelation of a heart. Jeremiah, feeling after things to come, says, It must be God who is to bridge this gulf,

and He will do it by showing what He is. The new order is to be inaugurated by a great act of forgiveness, in which all the heart of God will appear. In some public way He will treat the men who have refused Him as His friends, putting them all in His debt. Nothing short of that, as the prophet believed, will get at the obdurate hearts of men; but at the touch of an unmerited forgiveness, gratitude will spring up within them, and love, the power by which men know God and the constraint under which they are drawn willingly to obey Him. Forgiveness brings to erring men new conceptions of what their God is like—a God who does not deal with His creatures on terms of strict, legal precision, but who pardons at His own cost, and gives them what they have not worked for. And the very sight of such a God is a real new birth, clearing and deepening all the faculties, and making obedience easy.

The prophet lay still in the shadow, and centuries had to pass before the Light of all the world was revealed, and yet we cannot much improve upon his programme. When Jesus came it was to the undeserving, and throughout His life one feature is apparent—that His was a giving nature. To the most hopeless of men He talked as if there were no hindrance in the way of their return; and the only men for whom He had little promise were those who had no need of Him. He came to declare what is in God's mind; and God, as shown by Jesus Christ, is a God whose will it is to renew a fallen creation not by an exchange of giving

and receiving, but by giving with both hands. Faith, as Luther says, is the joyful persuasion that we have a merciful God. When that comes, the heart which He made goes out to welcome Him; and all clean desires, and nobleness, and every generous instinct may be looked for in the man who has taken such a God home to himself.

HOW GOD REVEALS HIS MIND.

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."—DEUT. xviii. 15.

THERE is no nation in which at some stage of its existence we do not find such practices as are here condemned. They occur in forms of varying dignity; but everywhere we come upon men endeavouring by some kind of trick or technical art to enter into the secret with which human life is encompassed. The witch of Endor who called up dead men to answer questions, the Roman augurs who found guidance for the people in war in the entrails of slaughtered beasts, the astrologer who read the fortunes of men and nations written large across the face of heaven, the wise woman of more recent days to whom the village people went about a sick cow or a false lover, the rain-doctor of the Bechuanas who, in time of drought, became an autocrat—they are all members of one family, and they tell of a universal instinct by which men are driven to knock at shut doors. In their practices there may be enough of

superstition and absurdity to raise our pity, but there is something noble too. For they tell of men refusing to look on life as governed wholly by accident, and eager for the assurance that it is possible to walk with confidence even in the dark. A yearning which is in no way base has led men along such obscure and ignoble paths.

In the Hebrew story there was record of another way of knowing the divine secret. Once, as the old tradition had it, the curtain was drawn back at Sinai, and the rude and childish nation was brought face to face with God. Nowhere in the literature of the world have we any passages so bold as these in which we read of God's coming down on the Mount and men's going up into His presence, where "they saw God, and did eat and drink." How much of literal fact was intended in the story and how much of awful symbol we cannot now guess; but when, in later times, the Hebrews pored over it, their judgment was clear that that was not the kind of access they desired, or could make use of. Such an unveiling as that was not helpful but overwhelming; and God, even in His revelation, must use concealments if they were to have any fruitful acquaintance with Him. So, in the fulness of time, there was born a Man, who did not oppress or bewilder the eyes of onlookers, and who yet could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

Within this chapter both ways are barred; the strange paths of magic and necromancy are for-

bidden, whilst it is confessed that the other way, of open vision, passes the strength of man. Then, must men consent to be as strangers in the world, knowing nothing, in spite of all their efforts, of the powers which rule their fortunes? That would be unlike God, who does not leave half hinges in His creation, a craving in man and no provision for meeting it. The hunger and the effort are themselves a witness that there is provision, and what that is our text declares.

First of all, God meets man with the promise of a guide. "To him that knocketh it shall be opened," said Jesus; and in view of this noble curiosity in men it is said, "The Lord thy God will raise up a prophet unto thee."

Men always find pleasure in looking at what raises their conception of the powers and possibilities of their own nature; and to whatever is adventurous, aspiring, even audacious, they give a welcome. And, with reverence be it said, God also finds pleasure in His creatures, not when they tamely acquiesce in their limitations but when they pass on to claim for themselves more than life has given. The world has grown both bigger and better by the courageous pushing of men against the envious limits of sense, for it is ever true that he who asks shall receive. In this human desire to come to an understanding with the mystery which encompasses, God is on our side. It is not His will that we should be in the world like wind-driven straws, beaten to and fro without any sense of why it should be so, and in His word He has given us know-

ledge. To fall back, as men have often done, on spirit-rapping and its companion arts is not only an intellectual foolishness, it is, as this writer felt, a failure in faith; for it means that God cannot be trusted to keep His promises, but must be surprised into conceding knowledge which He meant to withhold. He has given His word; and the honour due to God requires that we should be content to remain in the dark, if by lawful ways we cannot come to the light. It is a great part of love to be content not to see when it is He who blinds our eyes.

God has said, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." He is not wont to give to-morrow's bread to-day, and the promise here is not, in the first instance, of a single Prophet, for whom through ages they must wait. The temptation to turn to wizards and diviners was an immediate temptation which arose with every actual perplexity, and there would be little help in the assurance that, at some day far off, a Prophet would come, with a message so high that they could not even conceive it. God meets men where they are, and gives the assurance that for their recurring need He will make a suitable provision. He will see to it that they are not forced back into heathenism, but all along the course of their history they shall have men to guide them. So the promise is of a line of prophets, and the injunction follows (vv. 20, 22) that they must test these as they come. It is an expanding promise, which grows to match their growing needs. The earliest perplexities of men are childish; be it so—the Lord

has a word also for children. But as the hearts of men grow deeper, and they explore the mystery of life at other points, they shall have profounder answers to their questions. And when they come to the central secrets, where nothing can content them but to meet with God Himself, God still will keep His word, and man, falling at *the* Prophet's feet, shall say, "My Lord, my God!" That is what the promise contains, and it is wholly like God. As we are taught to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and to rest in the good will of God who gives it to us, so in this noble hunger the same assurance holds. The light has always come as it was needed; and it has not come simply as the result of any conscious effort on the part of men. The answers to the great questions which are agitated in the soul have not been attained by logic or research. The assurance that there is a God and a life to come, the way of pardon, the secrets of consolation, the sense of duty, these have come to men "not as logical inferences but as immediate intuitions in which the will of the thinker had little share."[1] They flashed into the mind, bringing their own authentication with them, and they were welcomed in the moment of their coming as most certainly true. The day came, and they were there.

That does not mean that effort goes for nothing, only there is much more than effort. In the moral and intellectual progress of nations the deepest changes have seldom been wrought by argument. In this

[1] Robertson Smith.

matter of witchcraft, for example, argument seemed to go for nothing against the irreclaimable credulity of men; and so the shameful story ran on of folly and knavery and brutality, until silently the world grew ashamed and the practices were dropped. There are knaves and fools about us still, but that chapter of human disgrace is almost closed, and yet we cannot point to any act or book or argument which closed it. In a large anonymous way (the Spirit brooding over the waters) the progress of truth advanced; and when the day came, men saw. In the Old Testament the same vast unconscious movement is apparent. The prophets were not deliberate thinkers apart from the mass of the nation, who sat down to hunt for answers to speculative questions. One thing or two grew nobly clear to them, and they spoke of what they saw. There is no dating of the origin of ideas in the Old Testament; and even the most original amongst the prophets present their message not as something new but as what men had always known; for it is a whole nation that thinks, and ideas, after some long process of incubation, are spoken of at once by many. The prophet felt that it was his business not to see what others did not see, but to make sharp and emphatic in words what already, through this providential preparation, existed in the general mind of man. When the knowledge came at last it seemed to be by a sort of intuition; men saw and were sure. And throughout the Church's history God's best gift has been the gift of men who can see, and who are able to believe that

they do see even if all the world besides declare themselves blind.

That is how God has kept His word; step by step He has guided, in hints and fragments, exercising men in patience and in trust, leaving them much in the dark and suffering them to feel how helpless they are to throw light across the gloom, and yet maintaining within them the confident persuasion that they are not lost or forgotten. That is a witness as old as Isaiah, who says (l. 10, 11), "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant? he that walketh in darkness and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that gird yourselves about with firebrands (impatient of the dark, and refusing to go on without an answer); walk in the flame of your fire and among the brands that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of My hand—ye shall lie down in sorrow." The firebrands burn out, and they go to sleep in the dark.

Yes, Lord, we will wait upon Thee for light; give us day by day the light we need!

2. The promise of a guide is made more definite. "Of thy brethren," it is said, striking at one of the weaknesses of the old world, in which these soothsayers were largely foreigners. Balak had to send to another country for an enchanter of sufficient force to blast the cause of the invader. Babylon was so much the land of magic that, by the time the Book of Daniel was written, Chaldean had ceased to be a national name,

and was used to describe a profession. In Isaiah (ii. 6) we read, "Thou hast forsaken Thy people because they are filled with customs from the East, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and strike hands with the children of strangers." It was a foreign art, just as, in later days, it became in Rome, and has been nearer home. Far birds have fine feathers. When men went to a diviner, they did not seek for what wit and judgment could do, but for something more; and for that mysterious something they could not look within the borders of their own land. They knew what could be expected of people like themselves, and thus, as what is unknown may be marvellous, they were driven out after men of another complexion and accent. From that search God called them back, for the knowledge comes from your brethren.

At first, that might seem to circumscribe their hope, as it hinted at what, soon or late, we all must learn, that this is a world of shut doors. If knowledge must come through men like ourselves, then on many points it cannot come at all. When men were asking of God where it was lucky to build a house, when to sow their corn, whether to make war and by what strategy, they had to learn that on these subjects God would not guide. To deal with matters of that sort they had faculties of their own, and character is fashioned by the acceptance of risks and the making of mistakes. But as soon as they began to ask about worthier things the limitation became a grace; for if we wish to know of matters which touch us intimately, of God, forgive-

ness, duty, prayer, we should not go to strangers whose life is different from ours, but to men like ourselves. The highest knowledge, it is here said, can come along the most familiar channels, and it *must* come along these channels. Though the prophets got their knowledge by a kind of intuition, it is no less true that they got it in very ordinary ways, for just in so far as they were good men, courageous, godly, tender-hearted, they saw its truth; and whenever they grew time-serving and self-interested and lazy, the message could not come. The greater truths of God can only be discovered in an honest and clean soul, and, more than that, they can only be retained in a clean soul; for whatever degrades a man at once begins to blur and obscure his certainty of divine truth. Jesus refused to commit the progress of His message to miracles which might be appreciated by anybody who had eyes to stare: "If they believe not Moses and the prophets," He said, "neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead," for God's truth flows along the ordinary channels of the understanding and the conscience and the heart. And when the highest truth of all was discovered, it was through Him who is the Son of Man, of our brethren.

The truth not only can but *must* come thus. There is far more in God than we can apprehend, and the mystery must be cleared and sifted by passing through a human mind and heart. We cannot even think of God but in our human way—of God to whom there is no past, or present, or future, but an eternal Now; of

God to whom there is no wideness of space, but all things stand up at once before Him. That baffles and overpowers the mind, and if it is to offer anything to the heart it must be translated into the forms of human speech and thought. "We owe the sun to the atmosphere which tempers its brightness," says Joseph Parker, "and we cannot amend God's way of coming to us." God is willing that we should know Him imperfectly. He is not ashamed to have us learn about Him through our fellow-men, though their thoughts stray and their words fall far below the facts. Nearness to men, courage and humanity and tenderness are a better equipment for an interpreter in divine things than the most soaring gifts, for men learn best when they hear in the tongue wherein they were born, and are spoken to where they are. There is no gift so fruitful or so necessary as this of simple humanity. It secures a learning beyond the reach of erudition, as Isaiah says of himself, "The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned that I might know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." "Of thy brethren," said God, whose will it is that what is best should come to us through these homely voices of the heart. The promise is given in kindness, as He brings His best things thus within our reach.

3. But there is a further narrowing of the promise: a prophet—of thy brethren—*like unto me.* That has a note of ambiguity in it very seductive to commentators, who have debated as to how much is implied. One scholar thinks it means—of thy brethren as I am;

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Driver insists that the coming prophet is to be the Lord's representative with the people as Moses was. It is impossible now to fix with precision the original shade of meaning. But very soon disappointment began to enrich and deepen it, and already in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which is a kind of epilogue to the book, it is written (xxxiv. 10), "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." The Samaritans in their separation and the later Jews were emboldened to find in these words a veiled promise of the Messiah. Every prophet as he came was tested by the standard they afford, and thus their mind moved forwards to the Prophet who occupied the future.

There was a familiarity and nearness in these early descriptions of Moses, which moved their admiration. It seemed as if human nature had regained what Adam lost, when he ran to hiding from God, for "God knew Moses face to face"; and in another place (Num. xii. 7, 8), when the writer has spoken of visions and dreams, he adds, "My servant Moses is not so, he is faithful in all My house; with him I will speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly and not in dark speeches, and the form of the Lord he shall behold." He stood so near to the great reality that he dared to speak as from God. That is one of the tremendous things in the Old Testament, that "men came under so overwhelming a conviction of God's presence that God's word breaks through them, and they speak to the people in the first person." It is really God whom we hear, and thus

there is an irresistible note of authority running through the Book. The prophet like Moses, when he comes, will not argue or dispute but declare, and if you face him in a spirit of controversy you will miss the gift which he has brought. The prophet is the embodied voice of God; and so it was said of Jesus, "He speaketh as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Thus it is to Christ that we are guided by this saying, for God does keep His word. "Of thy brethren," it was said, and in Jesus there is nothing foreign. All He asked for was that, having ears, we should listen; to be a man with a man's faculties and a man's needs is on one side enough for the understanding of His word. The children pressing round Him and catching at His clothes, did justice to His friendliness; the common people, hearkening to His word, found nothing there to baffle; and those who had despaired of themselves, since wisdom was for the wise and virtue for the good, rejoiced to find the best of all within their reach.

But there is more than humanity, there is authority in Him; and we must attend to the final admonition, "Unto Him shalt thou hearken." If we fence with the duty which He appoints, or seek excuse for our delay, we do it at our peril, for He is Lord. He is God manifest in the flesh, and those who come to Him are helped by Him to believe in God.

That is the end. In the strange arts which are here condemned we saw the nobler heart of meaning; they were efforts to come at God's secret, they were ways of

catechising the surrounding mystery. And whoever nobly aimed through them at God will welcome the Prophet who is the Way and the Truth and the Life. All efforts and questionings bring us at length to Him in whom God Himself is present. There are questions which we ask of God in which the answer matters less than the asking. We can go without an answer when, driven by our question, we have come to Him.

THE KING WHOSE POWER HAS NO LIMIT.

"Jehovah said unto my lord the king, Sit at My right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. Jehovah shall send forth the sceptre of thine authority out from Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy muster; in holy, beautiful garments they come, fresh, young, countless, like dew of the dawn. Jehovah hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever of My making—another Melchizedek.

"My lord the king is at Thy right hand; he shall shatter kings in the day of his wrath; he shall judge among the nations; he shall fill the battlefield with corpses; he shall shatter the head of his enemies over a wide land. He shall drink of the brook in the way, and go on with lifted head."—Ps. cx. 1–7.

THIS jubilant and magnificent Psalm opens with a passage which was taken possession of by the Apostles so long ago, in the name of their Lord, that it has lost any suggestion of foreignness; and just as some of our older colonies have acquired a look of England overseas, so do we welcome these verses, when we come upon them, as if they were an outlying tract of the New Testament. They give a description of the King, set at God's right hand, a Priest for ever, which in itself is great; and yet, in the writer's view, it was only a

preparation for something else. These things were spoken of Him that faith might have a chance; for what possessed the poet was not that his King was great and highly favoured, but that a King so great would go far and that of His conquests there would be no end. It is through getting big thoughts of the King that men are prepared to cherish worthier expectations with regard to the kingdom.

The poet first shows the kingship at rest, as it is in its dignity, created and secured by God, and when his heart is full of that he goes on to show the kingship in action. A royalty based upon the will of God, which, indeed, is nothing else than an instrument of that will, cannot but make way; present and future have nothing in them to withstand it, and thus it will go farther and farther, passing out at last beyond the imagination of men. That is the poet's idea, which a rhetorician would have expressed in some resounding phrase; but this man as an artist had no liking for vague words without any picture in them. He wanted men to feel that the King beyond their sight was pushing His conquests still, and he manages that by a quaint touch of imagination. The King, urging on His enemies in their flight, stops for a moment to drink, and then He passes off the scene with head uplifted, fresh as when the battle-day began. There He is—the true King, God's gift to men, travelling out beyond our sight, on always vaster enterprises, and without a sign of flagging strength. That fired the poet's soul, and it should live with us as the scope and outlook of the Psalm.

If it is asked what King is meant, the answer must be that we here have not a portrait but an ideal, which embodies the dream of those who trusted God one day to give them a ruler who should be all that a king can be to men. The Psalm falls apart into two portions, the first concerning His *dignity*, and the second His *destiny*, which corresponds to the dignity and is assured by it.

1. As to the dignity of the King the writer makes three assertions:—

(*a*) When He comes the King will be accepted by God and made associate in God's own rule. "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand." The Chronicler says of Solomon that "he sat on the throne of Jehovah as king"; and any pious Israelite might have said the same of any ruler of David's house. Behind the actual occupant of the throne there was always a more majestic Potentate, who allowed men, erring and short-lived, to play for a while the part which was His by right. Man after man, called not by merit but by the accident of inheritance, came and took his place on the throne of Jehovah, and did, with what of wisdom and thoroughness was in him, the work which was God's own. Each held the place for a while, unable to continue because of weakness; but through all the failures and vacillations of human governors devout souls looked up to their true Monarch. "To sit on the throne of the Lord"—that has a sound of greatness, but when it is searched there is more of humiliation than of splendour in it; for the throne is God's, and

the occupant is, at best, a feeble and dim-sighted man, who, in all he does, suggests his unlikeness to the true King.

But what the poet speaks of is not a mere official dignity, which could pass from unworthy father to unworthy son; it is a personal dignity, peculiar to Him who holds it. This King will not act for a little the part of a greater. Such fitness has He for this task of ruling men, such elevation of nature above His fellows, and such sympathy with the aims and thoughts of God, that God can single Him out among His fellows to be partner in His own work of rule. The New Testament writers applied this word peculiarly to the exaltation of Christ, but we need to remember that He claimed to be a King before His death and resurrection. "What is to hinder this man from governing?" says Carlyle of the Abbot Samson. "There is in him what far transcends all apprenticeships; in the man himself there exists a model of governing, something to govern by. He has the living ideal of a governor in him." In like fashion the poet sweeps aside the whole mob of kings so called, David and Solomon and their posterity, who in turn had claimed to sit on the throne of Jehovah. He did not mean that kind of thing at all—a merely titular kingship, which had no promise in it. One day there will be born a King, possessing every gift of rule, born to command the wavering hearts of men; and when He comes the first to acknowledge Him will be God, who will make a place in His universe for Him, and raise Him not to

where these spectral majesties have sat, these uneasy phantasms which have flitted across the scene, but to where none ever sat before. "Sit at My right hand."

The phrase carries with it a grand suggestion of repose. There is no strength in the world but of God, and wherever there arises any contrast or clashing of wills there, at once, is weakness. The true King is content that His battles should be taken out of His hands, and that the victory when it comes should be God's victory and not His own. In Him there is no self-assertion or display, but He accepts what God allows and asks no more. Inferior men may be restless, as they take on themselves the burden of the world and its future, striking in hotly in defence of their view of truth, and growing troubled and dejected when that view does not make way. But in the true Master of men there is a superlative trust in God; He suffers His own effort and His own message to pass into the sum of God's providential forces which are working for new heavens and a new earth. He does not bear the burden of the world anxiously, but leaves it in the strong hands of Him who can sustain it all. Peter speaks of Jesus "sitting at the right hand of God, *expecting*," which is a word of admonition for all unquiet minds, so ludicrously solicitous about the interests and the work of God. But whilst He was still on earth, Jesus suffered God to fight His battles for Him. He tarried for the Lord's leisure. He believed in powers which work slowly and work without noise, and He knew

the rest of heart of those who wait for God and are content that He should work.

(*b*) The second point of dignity is the priesthood. "Jehovah hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever on My account (*i.e.*, because I will have it so), another Melchizedek." From the earliest times there has been a recurring strife. The king has everywhere felt his power restricted, as he was cast on the mediation of a priest. Up to a certain point he was master in his own house, but there were places where he might not go, offices which he might not discharge. There were regions of feeling and experience amongst his people over which he had no control, and where they looked to another as guide. And through history we see in many forms the attempt of kings to invade the province of the priest, or to annex the other authority to their own. The mediæval emperor was a deacon in the Roman Church, just as the pope, on his side, was a great secular prince. In Israel, too, the king had something of priestly rank, as the Emperor of China still has. But it is of no such fictitious dignity that mention is here made. "Thou art a priest of My making," says God, "another Melchizedek." Professor Davidson comments on the picture which is given us of Melchizedek, without father, without mother, without descent. "He passes over the stage a king, a priest, living; that sight of him is all we ever get. He is like a portrait having always the same qualities, presenting always the same aspect, looking down on us always with the same eyes, which turn and

follow us wherever we may stand—always royal, always priestly, always individual, and neither receiving nor imparting what he is, but being all in virtue of himself."

"Thou art a priest of My making," says God. In this King who is to come there will be a priestly quality, which will not be justified by any technical test of inheritance or of consecration, for all such tests are irrelevant in His case. "He is a priest for ever;" as long as He lives, He is admitted to secrets, and He touches, as by deeper right, things which are shut to other men. The Baptist confessed that dignity in Jesus, "I have need to be baptized of Thee;" and to the whole company of faithful men this has been He through whom they have believed in God. In different ages of the world there have been men in whom a certain native priestliness has been apparent, men born to bring others into the secrets of God, and seeming to need no introduction or furtherance themselves, men who, in our Scots phrase, are "far ben," for they always, with unveiled face, see God. It is their task to make the hidden things apprehensible to us who belong to the rough world outside. And God's King, when He comes, will be a priest of that kind, whose priesthood is a matter of native endowment and not of human ordination.

Throughout the Old Testament there is an awful sense in the minds even of religious men of the tremendous adventure of priesthood. To the timorous human heart God has always had some face of terror,

and they have watched with superstitious awe those who passed in and transacted business for them in that Presence, where death waits for the profane. "I will cause him to draw near," says God, "and he shall approach unto Me; for who is he that hath been surety for his heart (*i.e.*, has staked his life) to approach unto Me?" A priest of man's making will always live within the skirts of the shadow of that superstition; but the priest of God's making has no fear, and he excites no fear on his account. With great ease and boldness, as if he were doing what is of his nature, he passes into the secret place and helps his fellows by his boldness to believe in unseen things. It is a gift of nature, or rather a gift above nature, independent of all that men have done or thought.

That, says this poet, is what men need—a Priest of God's making, not holding a priestly office but possessing the priestly nature, near God and near men, able by His mere presence to help profane men to lay hold of the hidden things of God.

(*c*) The third point of dignity is the joyous recognition of His people. "Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of Thy muster; in holy, beautiful array they come, fresh, young and countless, like dew from the womb of the morning." This is a matter less high and serious than those which have gone before; and yet, in the view of the poet, there was promise in the fact that there were no pressed men or mercenaries in the King's army.

An ironic historian sets side by side Frederick the

Great's account of the performance of his troops in one battle and a home letter of a recruit engaged in it. "Never," says Frederick, "have my troops done such marvels in point of gallantry, never since it has been my honour to lead them." And the soldier tells his squalid story, of men driven into battle with blows from sergeants' canes, skulking, when they could, behind walls, and taking the opportunity of passing through a vineyard to desert in scores. Frederick won many battles, but he won them in spite of a detestable system, and this poet finds a promise of triumph for his King in the glad loyalty with which He inspires His soldiers.

It would unreasonably detain us to speak of the many roots of courage. The greatest commanders inspire their men with such a belief in their leader and his fortunes as banishes the very thought of defeat. That quaint hero, Captain John Brown, looked in another quarter for the reinforcement of courage; when he was asked why superior numbers had failed to hold their own against him, he said he supposed it was "because they lacked a cause." When the time comes few men are found willing to lay down their lives in defence of what they know to be wrong. Then there is patriotism, the sense which men have of all they owe to their native land. And deeper than any is the religious emotion. "I raised such men," said Cromwell, "as had the fear of God before them, as made some conscience of what they did; and from that day forward, I must say they were never beaten." There

is good assurance as regards the issue of a campaign when the soldiers have a worthy spirit. "They offer themselves willingly," says this man, talking of the dim battle of the future, whose battlefield is as broad as the face of the world.

I wonder how much is implied in the curious phrase of the poet, "They come in holy, beautiful garments." (If that is the true reading, a minute change in the shape of a letter would give—"on the holy mountains.") It seems to say that the people following the Priest-King are themselves priests, just as in Revelation (xix. 13, 14) we read, "He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood, and the armies which followed Him were clothed in fine linen, white and pure." I think it is Christina Rossetti who comments on the strangeness of such armour against cut of sword and thrust of spear. But the suggestion is that the soldiers have one heart with their Leader, and are great in consecration like Himself. They go out after Him where hard blows are struck, where there is turmoil and shouting and the burden of the weary day, but they go as priests. That warfare which belongs to the extension of the kingdom of God calls for services which may often be sordid and ugly and painful; but when they are rightly rendered they are as sacred and as acceptable as any incense offering in the dim seclusion of a temple. The one priestly sacrifice worth speaking of which men can render is the offering of a heart given willingly to the divine service; and that cause is sure to prevail

which can count on volunteers of that complexion. "I have known many a man," says Thoreau, "who pretended to be a Christian, but it was ridiculous, for he had no genius for it." This poet was persuaded that his King would go far because of the temper of the people; ah me! what promise of Christ's final victory is given in our lives or faces? "They offer themselves willingly; in holy, beautiful garments they come, fresh, young, countless like dew at the dawn."

2. As to the destiny of the King. On the things of which I have spoken the poet bases his prediction. Lasting dominion anywhere must rest not on force but on character, and the more deeply this man considered the character of his King the surer he became of the final issue. There is "a vast wild world of sorrow" upon earth; there are powers of despair and defiance, old habits and private interests which withstand the kingdom of God, and even for the Prince of Peace, who establishes peace by His word, there is a battle to fight. Nothing is done without the clash of wills, when men's reluctance to change and their self-complacence and their instinctive avoidance of God are challenged. It is power against power, a long dumb wrestle, with each side putting forth all the resource which it can muster; soon or late it comes to that. Wherever wrong is found, there a man must be prepared to measure himself with it, and "try," in Carlyle's phrase, "whether he is stronger or it." It is never an easy matter to fight a battle through, and in these more intimate wrestlings against sin in every

form nothing counts except what the combatant is. And the poet, recognising that, was of good courage for the cause which had such a Champion.

Dulness and depression are bred in our ill-lighted hearts, and those with whom God is, see all the threat of life but they also see beyond it. William Penn speaks of "the inward, *steady* righteousness of Jesus," and the phrase might move our envy in presence of this vast battle to which the poet summons us. At every point in Christ's experience there was a sense of obstacle and resistance. Salvation for Him was every day a task entailing agony. But always He bore down the resistance, and, welcoming the reliefs that were given Him by God, He passed on with lifted head to the burden and the battle of the new day, sure of Himself, sure of His cause, very sure of God and victory. "True souls always are hilarious." Think of Him when the disciples came back from their first excursion, elated, as small men will be, by their minute successes; their ministry, I suppose, had scarcely drawn attention in the single province of Galilee and He had taken on Himself the redemption of the world. But hear His comment, "When you were away I was watching Satan and he had fallen" (an imperfect tense followed by an aorist). The meagrest encouragement, the first faint effort of a soul to free itself, spoke home to His heart, and He drew water with joy out of the wells of salvation.

In that there is an unspoken confession of the humiliation, for He needed such refreshment. He

knows our frame, and how hard it is for a man to maintain his courage; and when, in our despondency, we look to Him there comes from Him "such a look of solemn recognition as may pass between friends who have endured sorrow, and through it are united in a bond that cannot be broken." He knows our frame, and as He is ever true and does not hide a hard fact with a pleasant phrase, He says to us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The Christian history has been marked by revivings of courage in God's people, as if they, also, were given to "drink of the brook by the way." Each age has its own impulse which carries it a little way, but then there is the temptation to relax and to rest in what has been attained, as if that were the measure of the thought of God. But with another age a new call has come and courage to deal with it. Men have not come to the end of the warfare to which Christ has committed them. The gospel has a promise for every creature under heaven; it has an application to every variety of condition; it proves its power in men of every age. "It starts each epoch and each century with renewed ardour and redoubled vigour." The things that have been are the pale shadows of things which are to be. But every victory over sin in present or in future has its explanation in the greatness of the heart of the Redeemer, who still passes undiscouraged on His way.

At the extreme limit of his vision this poet saw not

rest and quiescence, but the King setting forth upon greater conquests yet. We are a laggard race, ever anxious and unready, afraid of what may come, doubtful if righteousness can really win the day; and our chief need is to kindle faith for the world afresh by a better study of the world's King. "He shall not faint nor be discouraged until He have set judgment in the earth, and the far lands shall wait for His law."

VICARIOUS SUFFERING AN EXPERIMENTAL TRUTH.

"We all like sheep had gone astray, we had turned every one to his own way, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."—Isa. liii. 6.

WE do not know, and there is no gain in guessing, who the sufferer was who is thus commemorated. "Vicarious suffering," it has been said, "is not a dogmatic but an experimental truth . . . a great living fact of human experience, evident to men's eyes, and appreciable, in its meaning, to their consciences." Somebody —Jeremiah or another—lived a life of absolute self-devotion and, as appeared, of defeat as absolute, and then he passed away without remark. There was nothing in him to draw the eyes of his contemporaries, nothing but his sufferings, from which, as average healthy creatures, they were rather inclined to turn away. He was one from whom men hide their faces, seeking to avoid him on the street; and he made so little impression on his age that the writer adds, "Who of his generation even considered that he had ceased to live?" Whatever the nobility of his life

may have been, that was the extent of its prosperity—a failure which had not even the compensation of publicity.

And yet when that life was over it somehow refused to be done. It is no uncommon experience for us to discover, weeks or months after an event, that we have been more observant than we imagined. When a situation, which in no way concerned us at the time, is recalled in memory, fragmentary impressions come drifting back, words which unconsciously we had marked, looks which had been noted; and we fit them together so that we begin actually to understand the episode from which we fancied we had carried nothing away. That is how the prophet proceeds. He, also, had been one of the unobservant, but something from that forgotten incident remained, insistent, provocative to the mind; and by degrees he began to spell out the meaning of what he had not regarded, until in the figure of that forgotten sufferer he found a key to the mystery of God's way in redeeming men. It is by self-devoting love like that, he says, that men are healed, and God's Servant when He comes will surely take that way.

A like process has brought many of ourselves to an understanding of the Cross of Christ. There are hosts of men and women who never seriously faced the Cross and what it stands for; of course, they have heard of it, but their minds never laid hold of the chapter of experience of which it was the close, and all that has been said about it within their hearing seems to have

passed over them like idle words. But one day, under some quickening impulse, they do begin to think. Unnoticed it has yet been hanging about the mind, and now it insists on being understood. And in a curious way, forgotten words and appeals gather back around it, until the man sees no longer an enigma without interest, but an unspeakable gift of the love of God to himself.

It is of this process of spelling out the meaning of Christ's suffering that I wish to speak.

1. What faced this man as he looked was a *great contradiction and anomaly.* His attitude at the time had been that of the man who has so much to do with his own work that he cannot afford to trouble himself with miseries which he cannot remedy. He makes no extravagant confession; like sheep we went astray, like sheep not wolves, for the common man is undistinguished even in his vices. Sheep, as Carlyle somewhere says, are "short-sighted and timid, and, for that reason, they are gregarious" they cannot strike out for themselves, but go where others are going. And this man admits against himself no graver charge than that he had pursued his own ends, which, even in that sedater world, must have been very much a necessity. He had his work to do, his life to live, and he was content that others should do as he did, and conscience uttered no reproach; but one day the spectacle of that neglected sufferer came before him and broke his comfort up.

Ezekiel relates how he sought the conscience of his

fellow-exiles when they would not let him preach. They were busy and prosperous, intensely interested in the novel experience of living in a commercial empire, and religion and thoughts of their own desolate land were pushed aside. So the prophet, as he tells us, laid himself down like a man crushed to the ground by a weight, and dumbly challenged their interest thus; or again, he sketched Jerusalem on a tile, the city and the lines of the besieging army, and brooded hotly over that. Day after day, through months and seasons, he used such arts as these, until questions were awakened in them. That mute preoccupation with one theme could not fail to make impression. Without the element of deliberation it was thus that the unnamed sufferer made his mark. The prophet, not yet a prophet, was provoked into thoughtfulness by the contrast of his own well-furnished existence with the remembered calamity of the other. For me are these so prosperous conditions, comfort, success, friendship, honour, and for him a life stripped bare, and set as mark for all the shafts of fortune. He was tried by ill-success, by misunderstanding, by ingratitude, by suspicion; he had no quietness, or home, or steadfast friends; he lived, as I remember, only to do good, and yet calamity rained upon him without ceasing. For many a day the prophet had run past that, too busy to throw it a thought, or content with the commonplace reflection that this man, like others, was smitten of God; but even in the busiest life pauses come, and one day he was startled by the contrast. Thenceforward

these two—this unknown man and himself—looked across at each other. It is God's world, in which events do not fall out by accident, and yet that was his life and this is mine. His was the disaster and the loneliness, and mine is prosperity untroubled. For him and souls like his one would say that the sun alone had cause to shine, so clean his ways, so fair his heart; and instead, darkness and forsaking were his portion. The writer grew uncomfortable and then ashamed. He grew less confident as to his title to those manifold enjoyments, and began to suspect that in God's world there were better things than getting on. That strenuous life which had engaged and satisfied him began to lose its dignity. "We turned every man to his own way," each to his own occupations, interests, duties; at the first that had seemed an unchallengeable statement of the only rule by which life can be lived. But now, as that sorrowful figure continued to beset him, his own rule of life began to look terribly like a kind of regulated selfishness, with nothing flagrant but everything unworthy and ungodly. It seemed what Peter calls "a vain way of living," without sufficient heart or greatness. And that disenchantment came simply through watching the contrast.

I do not know that there is anything more urgent for us than to see our life as he came to see his in a detached way. I do not mean as others see us, because commonly other people see no more deeply than we do. But if, in a flash of penetrative vision, we could see ourselves as God sees! I think that is what repentance

means; it is getting even for a moment God's sight of sin, as the act or the condition of an eternal creature. Many estimable people are travelling on through life without a suspicion of offence, doing what others do and judging as others judge—like sheep; and it never occurs to them to ask if their world has room within it for the Cross, in which they yet profess to believe. Actually they do not need it and they do not understand it. Walter Bagehot, in one place, speaks of those "gentlemen who revolt from what is coarse, are sickened by what is gross, hate what is ugly. . . . The law in their members does not war against the law of their mind. They live within the hedgerows of polished society, and they do not wish to go beyond them into the great deep of human life." And then, abruptly, he adds: "These are the men whom it is hardest to make Christian." Paul went everywhere, as he says, to Jew and Gentile testifying the repentance which brings men to God and the faith which casts them on the Lord Jesus Christ; but what have some of us to do with repentance or faith? They want to go on as they are, for they have not realised, as this man did, the shame and scandal of that selfish life when once it is seen alongside of an existence more nobly managed. It is still by seeing Jesus Christ in the mystery of His passion that men come to see themselves.

2. But now for another stage in this process of recollection. The prophet marked this great anomaly, with its look of intolerable injustice, but then, as he reflected on it, he remembered that the sufferer himself made

no complaint. "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." "Now," says Dr. George Adam Smith (in his *Isaiah*), "silence under suffering is a strange thing in the Old Testament, a thing absolutely new. No other Old Testament personage could stay dumb under pain, but immediately broke out into one of two voices—the voice of guilt or the voice of doubt. The sufferer is always either confessing to God, or when he is conscious of no fault, he is challenging God in argument. David, Hezekiah, Job are all loud under pain." Why was this man dumb? Whoever can answer that is near the heart of the mystery of the Cross of Jesus Christ. "Through oppression and through judgment He was taken away;" His hands were bound with cords, but it was in His spirit that He was bound. *Passus quia Ipse voluit*—He suffered because He willed to suffer; and therein is the secret of His dumbness.

As to this, Jesus made no concealment. "No one takes My life from Me," He said; "I lay it down of Myself." He was not conscious of the oppression of unrighteous powers, or of being the plaything of ungentle fortune. What came to Him came of God's sending, and it came in the way of the discharge of His mission, so He opened not His mouth. Preachers have often spoken unwisely of the offices of Christ, as if the office were the great matter, and not the person who holds it; but the teaching of experience is that offices of the higher sort cannot be discharged at all unless a man have some native bent towards the business. A

king will never be made such by his coronation, unless he have within him instincts of authority and of order. A priest can never be made by any form of human education; he must possess the priestly nature, the greatly daring and loving heart, which takes the concerns of men on to itself, and pleads in regard to them in the very face of God. And Jesus, Prophet, Priest, King, was born such. He could not be content within Himself, but must go out to find the sorrows, burdens, perplexities of men, which never seemed to Him alien or remote. As the world is made someone must suffer under these, and He claimed that as His part. All sickness and darkness and evil in the land were drawn together at His advent, and He treated them as no intrusion but as belonging to the ministry on which He had been sent. For His chosen business was to bear the inflictions which have come on the world of men, acknowledging them as righteous, and thus to bring hope and pardon to the hopeless.

Let us pause again to mark what this man saw. He was ready in the beginning to make outcry against the government of a world in which such calamity may await the holy, but what checked his protestation was the recollection that the sufferer himself was dumb. He took it as of his own choice, for he was content to suffer if his brethren might be free; and we have ill understood the gospel story if we have missed that element in it. Some writers have magnified the pathos of the Cross, a beautiful soul broken by the bigotry and the selfishness of men; and some have extolled the

heroism of it, a creature greatly daring who would not, by any threat, be turned aside from delivering his message, who, in the agony of death thinking only of that, shouts like a conqueror, "It is finished." These give occasion for spirited writing, but they only bring us to the beginning. To see the inner necessity of the Cross, how He laid it on Himself, and made offering of Himself through an Eternal Spirit—that is the real interpretation; and the power that changes lives is there. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

3. And thus the prophet drew to his conclusion. He saw the seeming contradiction, and marked the mute acceptance of it by the sufferer, and so he concluded, "It pleased the *Lord* to bruise him. *He* hath put him to grief." This, it seems, is God's way of making a new and righteous nation, and the Sufferer, living on and on with God, shall see and be content. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." "My Righteous Servant shall turn many to righteousness, for He hath borne their iniquities."

We have an evidence which the prophet lacked, an evidence which is outspread over nineteen hundred years, for, with reason or without it, men have everywhere been drawn to righteousness and to settled peace by the contemplation of the Cross on which Jesus died. When they come to that place the burden which has been pressing them hard falls away. The sin itself may remain, the evil bias and the evil habit, but the hopelessness of it has gone, and the dread of God's anger. Jesus, who sought in all things to be one with His brethren,

emboldens us to seek in faith for oneness with Himself; and in virtue of that mystical union our pardon is secured. As He associated Himself with us, so we associate ourselves with Him both in His doing and in His suffering. We make His confession ours; the homage due to the righteous will of God, which we cannot render of ourselves, we find in Him. We have no desire to stand apart, living our lives out in ways of our own; we wish to be found in Him, and judged only in relation to Him. Abundantly conscious of weakness and failure, we yet receive through this fellowship of life all the tokens of God's favour, light and peace and power to make progress. And thus we have assurance through Christ of the forgiveness of our sins. It is not for human effort to restore the fallen dignities of life, as if man were the doer and God, at best, the observer and rewarder. God is the doer, and you and I receive. He takes it as His business to make life simple, glad, and clean once more, and to attain that end He is willing to go all lengths. "He so loved the world," said John, "as to give His Only Begotten Son."

God, says this man, preaching still to you and me, God did it so, appointing burdens for His Servant in order that your heart and mine might be free. He was poor, but, remember, it was in order that you and I might be rich; His life was clouded, in order that ours might be rich in light and peace. At the last, He was in penalty and exclusion, in order that we might have the sonship. That is the witness of the Cross, and we are challenged as to our acceptance of it. To live as if

Christ's suffering had made no difference, as if there were no liberation or exemption through it, that is in contradiction of the whole Christian history, and more than that, it is a denying of the witness of God. For the blessed life is his who takes this witness in its plainness, content that the burden has been borne, the ransom paid, and that the way to God is open now for any man who wills to come.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass."—ZECH. ix. 9, cf. MATT. xxi. 5.

THE weeks are bringing us near to the time of the celebration of the birth of Christ; and I wish to speak of an anticipation of His coming and the use which He made of that anticipation. It is good to extol Him as King and to pray for His coming in power; but are we sure that we know what His power is like, or that, if we did know, we should deeply wish for its prevailing?

When Jesus came He ran upon a rooted misconception of His purpose. Nothing in His ministry was more deeply considered than this entry into Jerusalem, and nothing required of those who saw it greater seriousness and discernment. Here He presented Himself to the assembled nation in character, bringing to the front what He counted significant. He was born to be a king, but a king whose authority rests not on compulsion but on His power to persuade the

minds of men, and a king not parted from His people by the wide world of circumstance but sharing their privations and their lowliness; and He maintained that a kingdom founded thus would spread from sea to sea, and would last from age to age. That was a frank contradiction of what men have commonly believed, and thus it imposed a burden on their faith, as His deepest words are wont to do. They might very well not see the reason and the hopefulness of His plan, and they might be pardoned if they paused for information. There was nothing that, on the face of it, should have appealed to the multitude, yet it was received with the thoughtless clamour of the whole loud city. Some people would like to applaud sermons, and there are sermons which are quite adequately appraised by such a welcome. Applause is a relief to one's feelings, and, like any other discharge of feeling, it helps men to remain after an appeal what they were before it. But any serious presentation of truth asks for silence that it may be considered; and Jesus could not then, and He can seldom now enjoy that privilege of silence. Men want what stirs their blood; and thus in His Church He still rides on amongst the excited feelings of a crowd who, by their shoutings, show that they have not stopped to understand.

The passage in Zechariah, which suggested to Jesus the form of His appeal to the crowd, is a touching instance of how hard it is steadily to keep hold of a divine thought. Two verses in the middle of a chapter present themselves as the perfect utterance

of a man who sees what the true King of all the world must be. At His coming the peoples will lay aside all weapons of war,—chariot and battle-bow,—for He does not need such aids as these. "He will *speak* peace," says the prophet; His kingdom grows by the power of His word. Without any of these pageantries which have defended the dignity of kings, His power will stand unshaken. That is a picture such as occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament, and it shows how the Spirit of God was working in the hearts of men. But the prophet could not wholly escape from the world he lived in. He had spoken for a moment in advance of his age, as if the clouds had parted and he had seen the naked face of God's heaven, but the clouds drift back again, and he sees little more than his fellows do; and the chapter runs out to its end spirited, picturesque but sanguinary. Judah is God's bow, Ephraim His arrow, Zion His sword; Israel in war is like a lion at bay treading the sling-stones under its feet, and drunk with blood: "They shall be filled like the bowls of blood at the sacrifice, and splashed like the corners of the altar." To anyone who has felt the beauty of the earlier verses there is something of disappointment in that. The vision of peace which God had sent to His servant was nothing more, then, than an episode, exquisite but hurried, such as one gets from a train as it rushes through a countryside, and opens up for a moment a nook rich in pure loveliness, but the compulsion of the road swings you round the hill shoulder and away to harsher scenes.

The word was deeply felt, no doubt; but it is not easy, even for a prophet, to keep a thought of God undimmed. The thoughts which he is accustomed to think intrude, and the words in which he is wont to clothe these. Nature claims her right; and to nature the power which rests on pomp and force is always more intelligible than that which, without display, holds the minds of men by truth. That wavering in idea within a single chapter should be a warning to us as we turn to study more closely the thought and meaning of our Lord, for it is, clearly, not easy to do justice with steadiness to a divine idea.

1. In this symbolic action our Lord utters something of His mind about the kingdom. And first of all, He wanted men to realise that it was a fulfilment. In one sense it was a new thing in the world, as no man before had been able to give it reality, but it was also an old thing, which for ages had lived in the heart and hope of men. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, held in high honour the hopes and dreams, and even the gropings of His brethren. He knew that they did not always see their way with equal clearness, and they often chose their words badly; and yet He knew that when a man trusts God for some good to come, God is not less but more than His creature's thought about Him. There is a soul of truth in all prayers and in all hopes that rest on God. There is nothing in religious experience in any land, no real seeking after God however vague and formless, which

is not of God in its origin, and which, in the end of the day, does not find in God its fulfilment and its justification.

To Jesus the whole Old Testament was not equally and indiscriminately dear; at least, some words were to be printed in capitals. And yet in every part He saw God speaking to His children, and drawing out their hearts so that they tried feebly and stammeringly to speak to Him. It was all sacred, but of much of it He made no use. Like a master He passed through the great armouries and treasure-houses of the Old Testament, rich with the memorials of the past, and He chose for Himself what was worthiest. He had His favourite texts, like—"I will have mercy and not sacrifice;" He had His favourite books—Deuteronomy, and the later Isaiah, and some of the Psalms. The Lord of the great house knows what is of gold in His house and what of clay; and on this day of crisis, when He deliberately adapted His conduct to the words of an Old Testament prediction, it was because He acknowledged it as one of the central words. Remember—Jesus did not fulfil the prophecy by riding into Jerusalem on an ass, for it would have been fulfilled as perfectly if, in His lowliness, He had *walked* into the city. For the prophet's eyes were fastened not on the beast but on the King, gentle, humble, and yet irresistible. That is the substance, the rest is drapery. But for the people's sake, to catch and compel their attention, mere drapery may have value, and Jesus availed Himself of it that

they might understand that honour was being done to an old dream of the heart of men. For it was so that Jesus conceived of His own mission—to meet men in the desire and effort and hope of their hearts.

But as soon as their minds were turned to Zechariah's prophecy, one thought confronted them. "Rejoice greatly," said the prophet; and Jesus Christ, riding into the city, was consciously offering Himself to the people as a source of gladness. Ewald notes the substance of this paragraph in the prophecy as containing "the glad side of the future," which has its dark side also. Jesus, who had in Himself a springing fountain of pure gladness, and who set men singing where He came, to the scandal and displeasure of the older school, was grieved by the manifold gloom of the life of men. He heard men saying, "Who will show us any good?" They had sought it in many quarters; like that strange Jew who wrote Ecclesiastes, they had made experiment of pleasure, and wealth, and power, and learning, and had taken little by their quest. They had blamed the conditions of their nation, and had hoped much from political change; they had blamed the forms of religion and had put real heart into the work of amending these. But still the world's need of joy remained,—of something to lift the heart above conditions, to make it brave and carry it on though circumstances change with every day. No tidings could be more welcome than that one day God would give them that;

and the prophets deepened their words as they spoke of it, and men's faces were lightened even in the vague, far-off prospect of joy. And now, says Jesus, it has come. "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; it shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." "There is no book," says Renan, "which has dried so many tears as the New Testament;" and that man has not seen Jesus Christ, as He wished to be seen, who has not heard Him say, "Rejoice, rejoice greatly."

But, further, Jesus recognised that a great part of human dejection comes from the lack of rule. Man does wrong to man, the strong tread down the weak, and life is spoiled for both. It is there that Ezekiel asked for a king—to give the weak a chance; and in the Old Testament, that spacious book, there is extraordinary wealth of suggestion as to what a king may be. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the storm, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land"—one in whose presence there is protection, so that life can grow strong. "In His days shall the righteous flourish," for there have been governments whose fostering care was extended mainly to knaves. "He shall come down like rain on the grass," benignant, reviving, so that a life cut down to the very root, and sore and torn and naked, begins to feel the rising of new sap and the promise of fresh shoots. There is a huge, divine benefit in the gift of a right king. We live by reverence and obedience. It is a disastrous life in which a man finds nothing greater

or more authoritative than himself, no peak upon his horizon to raise and quicken dreams. There is no rest of heart until we know a power and a wisdom and a care beyond our own. It is good to be independent, to stand on one's own feet and meet the calls of life; but he who will be independent of God has, soon or late, the life of a hunted creature, exposed to a hundred hazards, chased by unreal alarms. Only when a man can say, "The Lord is my shepherd," is there rest for him. "Thy King cometh," says the prophet; and Jesus offered Himself to every soul along the noisy streets—*thy* King; a King to suit thy case, a King on whom thou hast a claim, a King in subjection to whom there is no humiliation. That is contained in Christ's offer of Himself—gladness through obedience, a fuller life through submission to One who is great and kind and near.

But this is a kingship of a definite sort; and Jesus, in every detail of His array, sought to make its nature emphatic. When Zechariah spoke of the King coming on an ass he had no other thought than of peace, but in Christ's mind the idea was enriched. He had to be indebted for the beast He rode on to the grace of a secret friend in one of the villages; and the trappings were the torn and weather-stained cloaks of peasants and fishermen. No one ever was so careless of looking like a king; indeed, He had a settled scorn of what is outwardly imposing. He knew how men are influenced by show, and that the mere pageant of authority will command the homage of many; but He did not,

therefore, seek them for Himself, for a kingdom which rests on such supports was not, in His view, worth founding. Pageant and display have their lawful part in the life of an empire; but the rulers whose hold upon their people has been strongest, like Frederick of Prussia and Victoria of Britain, have dispensed almost wholly with them. What is mightiest is what lies below the surface, and Jesus would not win men's faith by spectacle.

Two ways there are in history of gaining power: there is the way of compulsion, by which, if fortune and skill suffice, whole nations may be overrun and added to the conqueror's dominion. That is the rapid way, which bears, upon its face, the promise of success. It works by visible means which the common man can appreciate, and the issue appears at once. But there is the other way—of winning minds by the powers of truth and patience. This is a method which employs no herald, which takes no heed of the public craving for visibility, and thus it is easily ignored. Its results are not quickly secured, and whoever makes use of it must abound in patience. Pascal sets side by side the great conquerors and Archimedes, who fought no battles, and did nothing to attract attention, but whose discoveries live and serve the world of men: "Ah," says Pascal, "though he did not catch the eye, how he blazed out before the mind!" That is a lesson which, however slowly, men are learning, as they see that the work of the thinker and investigator affects the life of nations far more permanently than the most brilliant feats of

war. "Wisdom does not strive nor cry, nor cause her voice to be heard in the streets;" without strife or noise of words, by the persuasion of truth, by ways as silent and as irresistible as the working of leaven, Wisdom still makes her way.

And that was first in Jesus' mind as He rode into the clamorous city; the only King that God can give you is One whose kingdom comes with no outward show, so that men cannot say of it, "Lo, here it is or there!" Before anyone dreams of its presence, the kingdom is in their midst—working, as it will work to the end. Jesus was never impatient for quick, visible results, but was content to give things time to grow. He was not going to judge beforehand even of wheat and tares: "Let them both grow together," He said, "until the harvest." He did not expect to see His work within a man complete at once, for first there comes the blade, and then the ear, and only after that the full corn in the ear. If we cannot receive the notion of His disdain for what is merely visible and spectacular, we have read this section of His history in vain.

2. In this symbolic action Jesus not only declared His thought about Himself, He deliberately challenged them to declare their thought. It was Christ's plan to present Himself in ways which tested the discernment of men, and baffled those who could not believe in a new thing. Plain people of all sorts hailed with delight the appearance of a Teacher whom they could understand —a Man altogether friendly and accessible, who yet seemed to help them near to God; but the men, in

whom prejudice had usurped the place of sight, saw only a blasphemer whose life was a menace to religion. And that, in itself, is a warning of the risk we run of missing Christ's intention, which is hidden from the wise and clever, and revealed to the simple in heart.

On this occasion Jesus did what He never did before or after. He was surrounded by men who talked and thought a great deal about Messiah's coming, and who professed enthusiasm for it. The words were often on their lips; the hope, they said, was in their hearts; but Jesus, who knew the snare and the delusion of words, searched their profession to the bottom. Like an actor, but in deep and sorrowful solemnity, He dressed Himself to play His part before their eyes. He was close to the city and did not need a beast to ride on; but He halted on His way, and sent two of the disciples to borrow a young ass from a friend. And then, on His sober beast, with the crowd growing denser about Him, He paced up the slopes and in at the gate. "You say you are longing for Messiah's coming; you say that you look for Him to come to His capital riding on an ass; it has a good sound in the words of it, but here is the thing—such a King as the prophet spoke of—how do you like it now?" And what had seemed fascinating and credible, when it was found on the page of a sacred book, lost all its charm when it was seen in flesh. They discovered that such a power was ineffectual for setting up a reign of God, though they had liked the words about it. That was Christ's challenge and its result.

Will you also go away? You say you believe in Jesus Christ, and you are not startled now by what is familiar, this picture of Him riding on an ass. You take Him as He chooses to come, in lowliness—as at the first, or, as when He comes with clouds, in the unimagined glories of the end. The rhetoric of sermons and books raises no challenge; any word of Scripture that is put to us about Him we accept as true. But do we really believe in forces silent and pervasive like leaven? I think that Jesus Christ passes through our society to-day and tests us as He did the Jews. The presence of His Spirit is revealed in humble men, utterly sincere and good, the helpers and deliverers of their fellows; and some of us sniff about their orthodoxy, or question the propriety of their methods; and some disdain them for their manners and their accent; and all of us look with more of satisfaction to gifts which catch the world's eye. We nearly all trust in some degree in an arm of flesh, and find our comfort in a Church which is a kind of second-rate world, with supporters amongst the learned and the mighty. It is natural to ask for something looking like dominion, not a peasant riding on a borrowed beast, with a mob of pilgrims shouting round Him. Many of us might well be in the Church of Rome, enjoying the comfort of a pompous, visible institution, for they have no taste for the powers which are invisible. And yet "the things which are seen are temporal, and the things that are unseen are eternal."

There is no appeal which searches the heart more

closely than this; do we, in the end of the day, believe in truth? He said, "No sign shall be given you but the sign of Jonah," a man who arrives in a city alone, cast up by the sea, weather-beaten and uncommended, and whose only allies are the message which he bears and the natural, human conscience. That is My sign, said Jesus. He did not seek for eloquent, or learned, or remarkable men to go on His errands; and the power of the word, without fashion, or numbers, or authority to commend it, made its way. Jesus of Nazareth, on His borrowed farm-beast, with His wayworn company of poor men, and yet offering Himself to His nation as the King of prophecy, is the speaking reminder of the powers which lie behind our sight. I wonder when we, in the Church of Jesus, will learn from Him to trust these powers and to cease from man.

BEYOND THE BEST THERE IS A BETTER.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."—Isa. lv. 8, 9.

HERE is a word which might be written at the conclusion of every utterance pretending to authority about God and His ways. The utterance may be true so far as it goes; the author may have done his best and kept no faculty back from the work; but "we know in part," even an Apostle only knew in part. Do as men will they cannot keep themselves out of their thinking, and all their limitations and short-sightedness will make their presence felt. Any word a man can speak about God is, in the end, a man's word, and for its correction and amplification he needs to set beside it this other, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts." In different periods men have been very sure that the last word had been spoken, and they have resented the very suggestion of change; and yet the changes come, for language itself alters, and the experience of men is modified from age to age. Even

in connection with statements of the law and principle on which God deals with sinful men it is hazardous to say that they lie beyond the reach of improvement. They may be noble, and serious, and deeply rooted in experience, and yet God's way is always more wonderful than any man's account of it, and whatever hold may have been gained upon the mind by long established theories we have boldness to trust God to do even better for us than these suggest. "It has not entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God has prepared for them that love Him," says Paul, speaking of the gospel; and Luther, to the same effect, declares that "preachers are like young children, using half words and quarter words." If our first virtue is to seek to make them true, the second, surely, is to remember that they are only half words, and that we know in part.

In this chapter we have a great evangelical discourse on the Return from Exile, which is very grandly conceived. Israel was not going back to be as before, but to become the mistress and mother of nations. "Nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God." And along with that enlarged political influence there was to be a new satisfaction of heart; in that deep hunger which cannot be appeased with bread, God's gift would bring them rest. The promise was well-nigh inconceivable, and it was not made easier by the lowliness of the condition, for what was to "ring in the full satisfaction" was nothing higher or more revolutionary than obedience; all the

needed changes in the mind of statesmen and in the mood of the exiled people were suspended on that. "Hearken diligently unto Me," said God, "and ye shall eat that which is good," "hear and your soul shall live." Obedience, which, in the experience of everyone, has passed unrecognised a hundred times, was suddenly to work a transformation; and men, in listening, seemed to hear a fairy tale from worlds of other dimensions and powers than this, for things like that do not happen on the level of this arid and commonplace earth. To the exiles it sounded much as the preaching of the gospel sounds to some of ourselves, who do not doubt that satisfaction is a good thing, and their heart runs out in desire for a life more worth the name; but in this sober world, where still the second best prevails, how can it be? In all our Churches there are people who have settled it in their minds that, essentially, this promise is not true, but belongs to the delusive phraseology of religion where word and thing do not keep pace.

The glory of the preaching of a noble religion is that it "bears our intellect, conscience, emotions, imagination out beyond this world," and enables us to realise another scheme of powers than our senses have discovered; and that is what the prophet here attempts. Where man's faith was hindered he thrust in the bare assertion that God's thoughts and ways are not like ours. If things were really of the size and force which commonly are attributed to them there would be no room for a gospel to work; but then the world is built

in God's way; it is a grander world than we yet have dreamed, with secrets of power unexplored. There are height and depth within it, and what we count impossible is possible with God.

Let me unfold the promise of this contrast of God and man, as the prophet does, in three points.

1. There is *the contrast of God's forgiveness and ours.* We may turn the words about in many ways and put meanings into them, but what was first in the prophet's intention was to assert that God forgives, as He does all else, on a large scale.

As we know from Ezekiel, the Jews of that age were inclined to think of themselves as victims; it was not their own misdoings which weighed upon their minds but the ill desert of Manasseh and his evil court. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." In their theology the central figure was an implacable God, who followed with relentless step the children of a guilty man. Nemesis is lame, said the Greeks: but though slow in coming the judgment does come one day, and the victim cries and prays in vain. In the scientific guise of heredity the same idea recurs to-day, and many of us, if their minds were searched to the bottom, would be found to have no real faith in a God who forgives. Béranger speaks of "the God of good-natured folk," a God not unreasonably strict, who can, on occasion, be blind to human slips; and in Christian Churches many prayers are addressed to that "Dieu des bons gens." The trouble is that, when penalty begins to press, these

people have no faith to help them. A God who does not make too much of little sins they can understand, but a God who forgives, when the sin is very great, passes all their comprehension; and when the evil days come they are left without a hope.

Something of God has been learned from the men whom He made in His image, but even the noblest of human analogies has its limit. Every human tie has its breaking point, and therefore it is said even of a mother with her child, "she may forget;" but one of the experiences which unite the generations of men is the amazement of the forgiven, who, reaching the limit of his most courageous expectation, finds the mercy of God stretch out beyond him like the sea. The fault of all our human theories about forgiveness is that, in the process of explaining, we seem to narrow it; and thus we turn back to words which are better than human, as they come from Christ Himself, when He speaks of the father, who saw his son a great way off, and ran and fell on his neck. In that there is a grand theological artlessness; it seems to say that God forgives, not because a man is sorry, or because some condition or other is satisfied, but, at the bottom of all, because, in His heart, He wants His son back again. And in three successive parables Jesus declared that God knows the human joy of finding lost things. "He will *abundantly* pardon."

And what Jesus showed us of the *method* of forgiveness opens up the wonder of the heart of God. We say of a man suffering for wrongs that he has done, he

deserves it; and we stand aside whilst the judgment works itself out. But He, seeing men under the penalty which they had procured, thrust Himself into their lot, becoming their companion in penalty, and bore their sins in His own body. He took the fault as if it were His, in order to help them out of it; and He told us that that is the mind and way of God. We scarcely know what forgiveness is on earth. Even after a reconciliation relations remain clouded. Men may not quarrel, but something of the grudge remains; and if they forgive it is for once or twice, for few have patience to go with Peter to the seventh time, and then the heart, with all its gathered rancour, gets its way. Forgiveness is a hard thing, hard to bestow and hard to receive, as most of us have found; and so long as we think of God in the light of that human experience, it must be with reluctance. But His ways are not as ours; when He pardons He pardons out and out, and He does not remember our sins. The word was written at first to a race of men with a whole world of impossibilities cramping and disabling them, so that hope was crippled. It is spoken now to men whose hope is little and earthly. What you need, says the prophet, is to know the greatness of the heart of God, for all your human measures are irrelevant. He will abundantly pardon; He saves unto the uttermost; He will not remember our sins. It is within a world divinely great in purpose and power that the forgiveness of sin is assured.

2. There is *the contrast of God's thought and*

ours. This man, throughout his prophecy, uses the objects and spectacles of nature as so many sacraments of God, and here he finds his lesson in the rain. "As the rain cometh down from heaven and returneth not thither again, but watereth the earth and maketh it to bear fruit and bud, so shall My word be; it shall not return unto Me void." The vast spaces which part heaven from earth are thus used to help his confidence, for, once come, the rain does not immediately travel back over that long road, but accomplishes that which God pleases. That is to say, a divine thought, which has its source and origin in the heaven of God, is not an elusive phantom. Our thoughts are often mere glimpses of the skirts of an idea which passes us by; every man has mind and memory haunted by such ineffectual ghosts, which never work in the life of the world, or are added to its sum of truth. But God's thoughts are all on the way to become things, just as the rain coming down makes the earth to bring forth and bud. This earth itself, and the system in which it has a place, and the vaster systems which baffle our imagination, all had their beginning in the thought of God; and the solemn and terrific process by which they move towards their destiny is also the exhibition of a divine thought. Each man of us, with his little sphere of influence, his company of friends, his children, is himself a living centre of power, which has to do with the life of the world in generations yet to come; and each of us is nothing else than a realised thought of God. The Word, the Eternal

Thought and Reason of God, became flesh; a thought became a thing, and the hearts of men in every land are upheld in goodness to-day by the power of that thought of God. That marks the contrast of God's thought and ours; not that human thoughts are always ineffectual, but the fairest and pleasantest of them have no force behind or within them to set them forth upon the actual world.

There is nothing which works so powerfully against faith as the sense of the futility of human thoughts. We have our visitings of light, our movements of contrition, our touches of nobler desire. We are sons of God, and He does not deny sights of His face to any. The trouble is that the light only flickers for a moment, and then the darkness falls: "We behold our natural face in a glass, and straightway we forget what manner of men we are." We often wish for better things, but the imperious claims of the actual assert themselves, and the longing remains without result; and men grow sceptical of the brave assertion that by an act of faith they might break their bonds for ever and be free. Well, if it were man's thoughts only which are involved, the doubt might well be warranted, but there is God's thought in it; and the prophet hints to us how the life of a man who believes and obeys is environed by enduring things. The change in the man himself may be infinitely little and precarious; his neighbours may be unconscious that anything has happened; and yet, in his act of faith, he has passed out into the sphere of divine

things, which grow, and work, and outlast the earth itself. His will wavers, his goodness lies in moods which come and go, his vision is unsteady; and if his thought were all, it well might come to nothing. But it was a divine thought which arrested him, a gift of heaven like the rain which comes from above to do its work. It was a thought of God, God's personal and discriminating love, which found him out and mastered him; and that does not return void, it prospers in the thing whereto God sent it. To trust to our own resolves for our salvation would be vain indeed; but steadfast things appear about us, words which cannot be broken, powers which uplift and uphold, constraints from which men may not break away. These thoughts and powers are great to-day in the sight of some of us, but they will grow greater and clearer with the passing years, whilst other things decay. "I am the Lord, I change not," He says, "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." There is great rest of heart in the assurance that God's thoughts are not as ours.

3. But, to admonish, the prophet reminds us of *the contrast of God's character and ours.* The prophet says, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, . . . for My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord." Frankly we have to recognise that there are two ways of it, two measurings of the value of things, two views of life; and, soon or late, we must make our choice of this or that. The common

temptation is to shirk the choice. Within the Church of Jesus are multitudes of entirely worldly people, whose standard and aim are of this world. They live themselves, and they teach their children to live under the domination of the ideas of society, and yet they never doubt that they are good Christians. If we believe Christ, that cannot be; tne man who heard but who did not do seemed to Him like a man building a house without a foundation, which topples about him. We learn in life that there is a religion which is not Christ's religion. In our Churches there is a veiled paganism, hard, scornful, unforgiving, fashion-ridden, and the mischief of it lies not in what these people do so much as in what they think; and in returning to God the first necessity is that they forsake their thoughts.

It is thoughts of God's thinking which we need to set us right, and, remember, they are not as our thoughts. A man cannot come to the great God and remain himself, little and mean and suspicious; he has to give up something, to clear his mind of something, to get another heart and other eyes. When a man does come to God, it is as if he looked from the other side of the sky, seeing the same things but from another standpoint. His fault which seemed excusable in a trivial earth is now serious and great; repentance, I suppose, is nothing else than the sight, for a moment, of sin as God sees it. And Jesus, the man of Nazareth, the dim, far-off figure, with a kind of idyllic charm and pathos about it, is seen with other eyes, seen now

as God sees Him, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell.

When my thoughts about life are put away that I may get God's thoughts, Christ becomes the gift of God's heart to me, a Deliverer in whom the power of my new life consists, an Enlightener from whom I learn how to think of God and man. "If any man be in Christ," says Paul, "he is a new creature: old things have passed away, behold they have become new." His former judgments, his estimate of great and small are changed; he finds himself in a new washen earth. It is no power of earth that can work a change like that, but the redeeming will of God, who is able also to subdue all things unto Himself.

IMPRESSIONS

"Is it not a shame that we are always afraid of Christ? whereas there never was in heaven or earth a more loving, familiar, or milder man, in words, works, and demeanour, especially towards poor, sorrowful, and tormented consciences."—LUTHER.

"Jesus Christ made no inventions, He ruled no kingdoms; He was humble, patient, holy, sinless. Ah, but in what pomp He came, in what prodigious magnificence to the eyes of the heart and of those who can see wisdom!"—PASCAL.

JESUS THE PATTERN OF SAINTS.

"I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?"—MATT. iii. 14.

IN the Book of Revelation and in the Epistles we have the judgment of faith about Jesus: they tell us what He became to the heart which rests in Him. But faith is not at once made perfect. John himself climbed to his high level of knowledge only through the experience and the reflection of a lifetime. And whilst that judgment of faith is the last word on the matter, there are people who are not prepared for it, but must repeat the experience of the disciples, beginning, like them, with very simple observation, and rising as their hearts grow greater. How did Jesus look in the eyes of those who met Him? How did He live in the talk of His contemporaries? If we could answer these questions, we should still have much to learn; but some, who have found the Christ of theologians a perplexity rather than a power, might make a beginning. They would see, as John says, that "the life was manifested," a real human life, with real

temptations and real victories, giving promise of a salvation which is also real.

That image of the Son of Man as His neighbours saw Him, can only be pieced together out of hints and fragments in the Gospels, of which our text is a notable example. Jesus had not spoken a word or taken a step out of His seclusion, but already He had constrained His famous kinsman to recognise in Him one who was nearer to the divine secrets than himself, and who had power and right to introduce men into that closer fellowship with God and His people, of which the baptism spoke. The same witness is given in the narrative of the calling of the disciples. Why did they follow at His bare word? Simply because He was a man who did not need to speak or to do great things; He *was* great, and as such He had made His mark on those about Him. They felt Him to be higher than themselves, walking securely where they groped and stumbled; and their obedience was their recognition of His power of nature.

Little is told us of these years, but everything which we learn about Him afterwards throws light back upon them. Character and habit are continuous; and the tastes and preferences which were discovered in His public life are rich in information as to the silent years when habit was still forming. The baptism was a great occasion, when, with a quite new urgency, He was pushed out upon His appointed career, but it did not give Him thoughts about Himself or His work; it was the beginning of utterance, not of conviction. Some of the

Greek theologians imagined that, until that hour, He was the mere man, Jesus of Nazareth, but that then the Divine Spirit entered and took possession of Him; and some teachers of to-day have treated the story as if the new ideas only began to work in Him at that time. The fact is that, from His first appearance to the last, He never changed His line. Hints grew clearer as the end approached, but in His own mind His message and His method had been forming through these silent years. "John knew Him not as the Messiah and the Son of God," says Stier, "but he knew Him as one whose whole life from the beginning had silently cried, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?'" Whilst still a working man in Galilee, the depth and power of His interior life had prepared His fellows to expect great things of Him. Let me elaborate that in detail.

And first, of *His inner life.* How did Jesus strike His contemporaries in this respect? The one story of His boyhood which has been preserved is so remarkable for its childlike veracity, that in any other biography it could not have failed to be better understood; but there is a working of reverence which is stupefying. *Omina principiis inesse solent;* it is no unwonted thing even for a boy to declare his bent. The friends whom he makes, the places which he haunts, the pleasures which he pursues, are *ominous,* in the larger sense of the word. One boy spends his hours buried in a book, and no kind of book comes amiss to him; another has music in brain, and heart, and finger-tips; another, from far

inshore, has caught the scent of the sea, and has taste for nothing which does not speak of that. Where there is a bent, time ceases to be reckoned, and the boy will listen, open-eyed, to talk of which he understands not one word in four, if only it has the savour of the things which make life great for him. "Why sought ye Me?" said Jesus, opening a window for us into the ways of existence in Nazareth, where many of His chosen friends were old men, dedicating the evening hours of life to searching out the ways of God. In Nazareth they knew in whose company He was likely to be found if at any time He were missed, and they might have guessed, even in Jerusalem, where to look for Him. "Wist ye not that I would be in My Father's house?" To our rough workaday sense there is something uncanny in such a bent and appetite in a child; yet nature has her own reasons, and precocity is often a foreshadowing of a short life, whose hours must all be numbered and devoted.

That gives a starting-point, but the habits which we hear of in Him help us farther in our understanding. "No man," says Carlyle, "becomes a saint in his sleep," and no man becomes a master of Scripture in his sleep, for that demands both study and a rightly managed experience. Now when we come upon Jesus in the Gospels, we find Him with a way of reading Scripture which is His own. He had favourite books and passages in which, peculiarly, He found guidance and cheer. Looking closely at His preferences, we may see how He had

silently dropped out of reckoning nearly all the portions which counted for most with the teachers of His time. The fabric of law and ritual, for example, had no interest for Him. He joined with His contemporaries in magnifying the promise of a Messiah; but whilst His neighbours had their conceptions, in which the Baptist shared, of a Christ coming in storm and flame, to make an end of sinners and to establish a new reign of saints, He turned to passages, like the fifty-third of Isaiah, which they had not read as Messianic at all, and He found His pattern there. Every man who lives with Scripture comes to have a Bible of his own, where words stand out emphatic and enriching just as his own experience has helped him to receive them; and the Bible of Jesus, as we see it employed in His ministry, was extraordinarily personal, for everything for which He had no use had fallen decisively out of sight. "Things were written for the hardness of men's hearts," He said. All the pedantries of law had fallen aside; the very thought of such a God as would kill a man for wanting to steady the ark He dismissed as incredible. Providences and accidents never justify us in concluding that God is angry, He said. Thus He discriminated, and made what had lasting worth His own. And that process by which His Bible was fashioned for His own use tells much of a real, human, inward life.

We often read of His spending 'nights in prayer, which our Western standards keep us from fully understanding, for these nights on the hills are not peculiar

to Jesus, but are a common feature of Eastern piety. Of Mohammed, before he offered himself as a prophet, it is recorded that "he was constantly engaged in devotions. He passed much of the night in prayer, and in pious ejaculations, and repeating the name of God." Jesus would never be ashamed to call such eager souls brethren. His work as a carpenter held Him occupied through the day, but at night His place was empty, and often for days together He would be absent in the hills; and the people who clustered round the shop looked on Him as on the way to sainthood. No doubt there was some touch of disparagement in their judgment, but there was also awe; for these men, immersed in material affairs, acknowledged in this Carpenter something beyond themselves. And the children and the lads of the town gazed with a curious wonder upon Him when He returned in the early morning to His work, weary but victorious. That is a feature of which we may be sure, and it gives vividness to our conception of His manner of life.

One thing which confirms this reading is the claim of His mother and brethren to control and even to recall Him. They evidently felt that He needed to be looked after, lest through His unworldliness He should run out into excesses. The practical spirit, though it may acknowledge the superiority of the life of prayer, is quick to take back what it has conceded, and inclines to treat a man of spiritual elevation as if he were a kind of infant in the world, not to be trusted to find his own way or manage his own life. The practical

man is clear that spiritual laws, however good within their own province, are dangerous when pushed too far. That was the mind of Mary and her other sons; and it throws a flood of light back upon the years in which His reputation in the district was being established as a creature very near to God, but looked on as correspondingly unfitted for the battle of life.

2. We have no boyish record, like that of Luke, to serve as a starting-point for a discussion of *His unforced love of men*, but it is clear that, in this also, the baptism found Jesus with habit formed. He was born into the society of the respectable working class, which is parted from the disreputable by a gulf far wider than that which severs rich from poor. His neighbours were as jealous of defilement as any gay Herodian, and He would have little encouragement in mingling with the outcast world. There were lepers crouching near the city gates, for whom life grew darker every day, and lunatics and epileptics whom human harshness and ignorance banished to caves in the hillsides; but people scarcely dared to touch them, for they were under the curse of God. Then there were moral outcasts, very different in look and attire—publicans of all degrees, growing fat upon the spoils of a nation, and harlots in their noisy mirth. These were relentlessly excommunicated by the society of the respectable, but in the very beginning of His ministry we find Jesus reaching out a hand to them, as if He had been waiting His chance with purpose formed. The common man fears injury for himself, in health or reputation, if

he is much in contact with such people, but Jesus had no such fear, and His one concern was to see how He could aid them best. And in His beloved fifty-third of Isaiah He found the counsel which His neighbours could not give. If I am to help these people it must be, He saw, by inserting myself into their conditions, and becoming an outcast with them; and that grew to clearness as His plan of life.

I like to think of the Baptist's word, "Behold the Lamb of God," as a reminiscence of actual talks with Jesus. To John the saying could not possibly have the meaning which it has for us; but time after time, as he met his Friend, he found Him more and more settled on the one point. John had his own way of bringing in the kingdom—a policy of clamour and alarm, and he had Scripture to support him, but his Kinsman had a different thought. He did not wish to scold and threaten men from a standpoint of superiority, for His dream was of a place at their side. He did not think that men would be frightened into goodness, as John expected, but rather that they must be won by a love which bears and atones. That was the drift of His thought throughout these sacred years, and His earliest public step was in that direction. Baptism, as we know, was a ceremony in later Israel for the reception of proselytes, and when John turned it to use in his mission it implied a searching condemnation. It declared that Jews, near by covenant to God, had fallen away, and must return to Him like mere outsiders; but Jesus, declaring His thought, came to take

His place with those outside. Such an act was liable to misconstruction, as if He were confessing fault, but of misconstruction He never stood in dread; and there, most willingly, He stood beside His brethren,—Companion in order that He might be Saviour.

Professor Davidson notes the frequency with which in early Arabic poetry the hermit's lamp, twinkling in the night from his cell, is spoken of. The desert people felt the awe of that silent symbol of a prayer which lasted out the night, and the same awe lives in John's confession, "I have need to be baptized of Thee." A life which needs the help of words, if it is to be understood, is a life of a poorer sort. John made no question of his own vocation; and when Jesus took another road than his of bringing in the kingdom, he held still to his own, trusting that there were more ways than one of serving God. But, in intrinsic quality, he felt himself rebuked in presence of his Kinsman. All rights of office fell away, and he had no word to speak. If Jesus took the place of an outsider, then what must the Baptist be? And he stretched out his hands to One in whom he divined already a mediatorial quality, saying, "It is Thy business to introduce men into the kingdom." Matthew uses a verb in the imperfect tense, suggesting that John did not rest in a single refusal: "he kept on preventing," making a persistent attempt to hinder what seemed to him a wrong. Thus, when he yielded, it was against his heart, and, like the angels, he stood and gazed into a mystery which seemed to border on profanity, as

the holiest of God's sons bowed there, Companion of the outcast.

When we think of Jesus Christ as an official, called of God to be a High Priest, we should consider, in the light of these things, that He is not merely an official, but, by an irresistible bent of nature, the Mediator between God and man. From His earliest day, He took this strange and lonely road; and it led Him, after years of silence, first to the Jordan and then to the Cross. And the Apostle, surveying the amazing story, said of Him that He came to be the Christ, through experience of the water at baptism and of the blood on the Cross. These things made Him what He is to the world of men, but they had been in His heart long before they were realised in deed.

THE GENIALITY OF JESUS.

"Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."—MATT. xi. 19.

WHAT is to be made of this ancient slander? What light does it throw on the behaviour of our Lord among men? For even a slander has commonly some kind of relevance, and "where one's enemies find a chance to taunt, one's friends almost always find occasion to be puzzled." The second clause by itself would present no difficulty. If one hears of a missionary established in a peculiarly squalid region of a Chinese town he does not suppose that, by any natural propensity, the good man has chosen vice and dirt and ugliness; and when we read that Jesus was known as the Friend of publicans and sinners we take it simply as a compliment paid by an enemy to the greatness of His heart. But the first clause (although the slander of it is obvious) does give a clear suggestion as to His ways in society.

For the sake of contrast let me repeat words from one of the greatest preachers of our time. Professor A. B. Davidson says: "Did it ever strike you that

Christ never was a child? . . . You do not fancy Him a child like your children, gay and free of concern; He was grave, retired, and sad. He moved about with a weight upon Him. It is not anywhere recorded of Him that He smiled. . . . You can hardly fancy that He ever looked young." I do not know where that conception of the child Jesus took its rise, certainly not in the Gospels; but, clearly, if that conception were justified, such a slander as this could never have been imagined. It would rather have been said of Him as of John, "He has a devil," sullen, sombre, inhuman. He said of Himself that His attitude to society was as different from John's as a wedding is from a funeral. I piped and ye did not dance, he mourned and ye did not weep; My call has been to mirth, just as John's was to seriousness and tears. When the complaint was made that His disciples did not fast, He defended them in a phrase which is unmistakable, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn whilst the bridegroom is with them?" On his wedding-day a man has little thought of the morrow; cares and troubles wait for him as for all men, but they cast no shadow on that day; and that, says Jesus, is the temper in which My friends and I move through the land. The dominant note in that little society was a genuine joy in life, and that made Him welcome amongst people whose mirth is near akin to recklessness, and incidentally it gave occasion to the propagation of this slander. If we are to understand Jesus and His work we must take account of the fact which

the slander attests, that He lived His life in the sunshine, with light hearts and happy faces round about Him.

Let me speak of certain features of the religious temper of that age and of this, which made misunderstanding unavoidable.

First of all—there was a tradition, which has never quite died out, that a religious man ought to be grave and even sombre. Josephus says of the pious of his day, "They renounce the enjoyments of life, and in nothing surrender themselves to comfort." Now the world has never been an easy place to live in; temptation is very real, and no one with open eyes can fail to be impressed by the spectacle of human sorrow and human failure. A deeply religious man will certainly not be found sharing in heartless frivolity; but the tradition has run far beyond that, until in many quarters it has excluded sunshine and lightheartedness from religion, and has set man trembling in the presence of an angry God. Dr. Johnson, on a famous occasion, pronounced that "this merriment of parsons is mighty offensive," which is the judgment of Josephus repeated in another age; and Dr. Davidson's imagination of the child Jesus as "grave, retired, and sad" is in the same key. In a half-comic way, that has given the law for men's behaviour in church, where they sit with such preternatural solemnity of countenance, as if religion were, of all interests, the most depressing.

But think of Francis, that troubadour of Christ,

with his wealth of sunny inspirations, with song and laughter and flowers woven in with that perpetual ministry to the Lord and His poor; was that unevangelical? Or think of Pascal, when his eyes were opened, elated to such an extent that his sister had to ask what his spiritual director would think of such a *gleeful* penitent. Or, above all, think of Jesus and the disciples, these children of the bride-chamber, who lived one day at a time, and found each as it came the very flower and glory of days. I suspect that true souls are always hilarious, and that one step towards the restoration of the evangel in the Church would be the breaking of this tradition and the letting in of the sun. Dr. Davidson says of Mohammed that he had that indispensable requisite of a great man, he could laugh with all his might. And in a follower of Jesus something like that is still desirable.

That conventional gravity is responsible for a great deal of the aversion from evangelical religion; men hold back from Christ because they wish to live in company with gladness, and yet it is gloom which is unevangelical. A man who can laugh and be kind is not certainly farther from God than his neighbour, penurious and austere, and Jesus, in His choice of companions, showed His sense of this. He did not find Himself at home with people who thought it the right thing to be anxious and grave. The world for Him had admonitions of its own, but where He saw so much of the bountiful love of the Father He refused to have sobriety canonized. The sparrow that falls

from the housetop dead did not turn Him to sentimental thoughts of how all things suffer and die; He caught at the brighter side that not one of them is forgotten before God. The ravens in winter did not make Him think of their hunger, but of how our Heavenly Father feeds them and us. To Him it seemed a kind of profaneness not to be happy in a world in which everything is accounted for by the providential care of God. There will be no lack of earnestness in a right man's life; but the sense of the divine bounty ought to give a character of cheerfulness to the whole.

2. Along with that He found a stubborn belief that the best man is he who has fewest faults. "Many people," says Thoreau, "are anxious to be good, but they do not want to be good for anything;" and that negative conception of morality held the minds of men in later Israel to such an extent as to make them suspicious of anyone who freely entered into life, sharing its enjoyments and its risks. The stricter Jews silently took it for granted that the relations of society were too perilous and ambiguous for a man to encounter if he were in earnest about his character. It became the badge of a man who was taking his life seriously that he should keep out of such associations; and when they saw a religious teacher freely taking His place at the tables of publicans they promptly judged the worst of Him.

Most of us know what justification there is for these ascetic precepts. Dr. Phillips Brooks speaks of the

way in which men lose their individuality in society. Even a casual company of strangers, gathered about a table, acquires a character and tone of its own, and a man, without meaning it, is borne on the tide of talk in directions which he may afterwards deplore. Few of us are strong enough always to resist that influence; and it is mortifying to remember, when we are alone, exaggerations which we indulged, sneers at high things which we condoned, scepticisms which we almost shared under the spell of the prevailing tone of the gathered company. Christ's contemporaries knew that as we know it, and it was in their own experience that they found warrant for their suspicion of One who so freely moved in these surroundings. Only they forgot that morals is of all sciences the most individual. No man is free to assume that what is safe and lawful for his neighbours is safe for him, and, on the other hand, he has no right to conclude that another is doing wrong in going where he himself ought not to venture. A man is bound to find his own way, and security depends upon the power and sanity of his nature. And in the society in which most men lose themselves, Jesus asserted Himself. He was welcomed as one so frank and buoyant and wholesome as to be a companion for everyone, but He remained as the real Master of the occasion, who had changed its character and made its mirth perpetual.

But the contrast between Jesus and His critics was not merely a difference in power of nature, there was a cleavage between them in moral opinion. Since they

held that a man who meant to be safe must run no risks, it followed that, in their view, the pattern life was a cloistered and unmilitant life, with its strength engaged in avoiding faults. That delusion still remains; and, because of it, many hard-driven men, in a half-pathetic way, accept the idea that goodness of any high sort is not within their reach. They have to walk in miry ways and push ahead; they get anxious and worried, and lose their tempers, and they have little time for prayer. And with hearty admiration they look at the sweet, secluded graces of good women who are never hurried or hot, who live in meditation, and who unfailingly do what is right in a beautiful way. That is an old tradition, but, emphatically, it was not in that direction that Jesus looked for the best kind of man or woman. He had immense regard for the moral capacity of hard-wrought people. He was without sin, but He had an eye for a man who could risk something, on occasion, to get good done. Virtue in His view was not the absence of fault but the presence of some positive quality, not avoiding mistakes but doing good. This timid, ascetic theory of virtue may be a counsel of wisdom for many of ourselves, who need to pray continually, "Lead us not into temptation," but it belongs rather to the school of the Baptist than to that of Jesus. The Pharisees hated John, but at least they understood him, and, in a way, approved of him, for he looked like an earnestly good man. But Jesus they could not understand; He did not seem to them to be good at all, so frankly did He

fling Himself into life for the chances which it offered of serving men.

3. I have noted how in Christ's day religious people were expected to be grave and to keep aloof from anything that savoured of the world; and it was only natural that, with such traditions, there should exist great sternness of condemnation for all who ran out on the side of passion. Their revelry was a kind of affront to their sober neighbours, and any calamity which came upon them seemed too natural a result of their recklessness to call for any pity. They might have known that that is the end, and they went with open eyes. It is an old controversy of cold blood against hot, of old heads against young, and it is hard for them to come to terms or to do justice each to the other's point of view. Bagehot held that the deepest source of the antagonism of Cavalier and Roundhead lay just here. There are people born into the world with what he calls "the enjoying nature"; and the Cavalier, with his high temper and his hot words, disliking sermons and introspection, and loving his sport in the open air, seemed to the Puritan a very ungodly person, over whom it was needless to shed tears if his joy in living led him down into folly and excess.

I suppose we would all admit that the Church has never made what she might of these enjoying natures. They do not like to sit still; they have no habit of meditation, and much of the preaching which they hear touches on nothing which closely concerns them. And so they have grown apart, the joy of many homes,

the pride in hours of crisis of their country for which, in their reckless way, they venture all — creatures whose departure would take the colour and interest out of the world, and yet we get but little from them for the work of Jesus Christ. The Church, I say, has commonly got little from them, because it has understood them badly; but Jesus Himself understood, and at this point He and the Pharisees were at war. To the respectable, church-going people of every age the faults of the enjoying nature are scarcely pardonable, whereas Jesus reserved His indignation for the faults done in cold blood, for the man who devours widows' houses and who makes long prayers, and for all who make one of these little ones—the ill-established souls—to stumble. Of things which are done without scruple and in the way of business by church members, Jesus said, "It were better that a great millstone were hanged about their necks and that they were cast into the depths of the sea." He, certainly, was no tolerater of lust and excess, knowing how, in the end, "they petrify the feeling"; but the fact is plain that to Jesus the sins which we count big were insignificant in comparison with others which we scarcely reckon sins at all.

Jesus did love a man who was able, sometimes, to be reckless. He did not care for the rulers as a class, but when one of them forgot his dignity, and ran after a peasant teacher and fell on the road at His feet, we read that "Jesus seeing him loved him." He did not choose for His disciples discreet and futile persons, but a man

whose temper was not always under control, and whose tongue was rough when he was roused, and another who might have been a saint, but his life got twisted and he betrayed his Lord. He saw a widow flinging into the treasury all that she had, which no doubt was a very foolish action, but it stirred His heart with gladness to see somebody venturing herself simply upon God. He wanted life in men, energy, impulse; and in His Church He has often found nothing but a certain tame decorum, of which even He can make little.

And so from this long consideration I come back to the point that if we find Jesus associating with sinners it is not merely as a missionary seeking to help them, but because He found something in their character to attract Him. Some men have spoken foolishly as if there were no way to the Father's heart but by the swine troughs, but Jesus clearly felt that the mere article of staying at home and doing nothing wrong may be over-valued. A man may have that to his credit and be a very unlovely person, with no touch of sympathy with the Father's mind. Many go tragically wrong. They are reckless creatures of impulse, and in their misdoing they show a kind of abandon and unreserve; but Jesus hoped that if they turned they would turn with all their heart, and bring to the new adventure the same rush of nature which had swept them so far away from good. "There be last," He said, "who shall be first." "A gospel which excluded them," says Bruce, "would be a one-sided, uninteresting affair, bringing a petty salvation to people of petty character. Who

could grow eloquent over a gospel under which Simon was taken and the sinful woman left?"

Jesus, the Creator, whose work is seen not in pale abstractions but in flesh and blood, believed with all His heart in life. He is commemorated in His Church not by a fast, but, throughout the ages, He sits at the head of His own table as Host, at a festival of abundance and joy and union. He came to make these possible. He sought out in the world all people of affluent nature, not chilled by learning or manners, but with some voice of the heart in them, and where He found such He had hope. I wish His Church could learn the lesson from Him, and could make access easier for the multitude of enjoying natures in whose companionship He found such pleasure. For about them He held the assured conviction that, even though they may have fallen to be last, it is in them by His grace to be first, true saints, the splendour and the light of His kingdom.

OUT OF HIS FULNESS——

"Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."—MATT. xv. 27.

IN the previous sermon I had occasion to speak of the snare into which some have fallen of letting their sense of the tremendous gravity of the work of redemption affect their imagination of the look and air of Jesus as He wrought redemption out. It is true that the Cross threw its shadow back over these memorable years; it was present in His purpose from the very outset of His ministry. But that does not mean, as some have said, that "He moved about with a weight upon Him," that He never smiled and never looked young, and that even as a child He was "grave, retired, and sad." A Christ of that tragic humour would scarcely have drawn young children round Him as He rested by the roadside, or made Himself a welcome guest in companies where mirth was habitual; and it would be strange indeed that the disciples of such a Master should be taken to task by onlookers for their want of suitable gravity. But, beyond all, it may be said that a Christ of look so shadowed would never

have given to men the triumphant persuasion of adequacy, which we find in those who followed Jesus. A man can hardly take his work too much in earnest; but if he suffers it to weigh upon him, you begin to doubt if he will see it through. If he is to kindle confidence in others he must, with all gravity and concentration, yet bear himself with a certain lightness of heart. "A picture," says Sir Joshua Reynolds, "must not only be done well, it must seem to have been done easily;" and that, I think, is one mark of a great nature that it gives men the impression of sufficiency, so that they cannot doubt that the mind is equal to the work. Jesus, as we know, had tremendous reactions in private, when His soul was submerged by a desolating tide of doubt; but when He came out to face men nothing of that gloom or conflict was apparent, and to everyone He gave the impression of such adequacy of nature as made it easy to trust Him out and out.

There is much in this story of the Canaanitish woman which might engage us; but I wish to fasten your attention on this fragment of unconscious, contemporary witness, which reveals Him as He appeared to a host of untutored souls. They knew little about Him, and had no thought of His divinity in a theological sense; but instinctively they guessed at a kind of affluence which made them surprised at nothing He did. Listen to some of the voices of these unlettered folks. "If I touch but His garments, I shall be whole," said one, whose thought was defective, but her confidence

in His bigness and kindness was absolute. A leper came beseeching, and kneeling down to Him, said, "If *Thou* wilt, *Thou* canst make me clean;" the disease, in the judgment of his time, was incurable, but with such a man as this even the impossible might be done. Things were going badly with His cause, adherents were falling away, and authorities had pronounced against Him, but a group of peasant women "brought to Him their babes that He should touch them"; the religion of their class was little else than superstition, but they had an inner sense of what was noteworthy, and something seemed gained for the child whom He had touched. This woman herself felt that He was one with whom she could talk and even play at words. His own phrase had no edge of cruelty on it; He did not speak of the dogs of the village streets, unclean, exasperating, and often dangerous, but, in a half-humorous diminutive, He spoke of the household pets. And she answers diminutive by diminutive: "Truth, Lord," she says, "I am nothing better than a poor pet dog; but then I am not asking much, I wish nothing more than scraps." Friends, it was not a haggard, burdened, unsmiling man that encouraged an unknown woman to feats like that, but one who met smile with smile, one who looked so strong and spacious that even the most inestimable benefit seemed to those who saw Him like an unconsidered crumb out of His abundance. It is of that impression of fulness and ease that I wish to speak.

"How could Shakspere be expected to be astonished

at what he did every day?" says Hazlitt; "he knew of nothing within himself of which he felt it worth while to be vain. He would as soon have been vain of his power to put one foot before another as of his power to write the *Tempest* or *Macbeth*. It belongs to genius as to beauty to think little of itself." There are words in the Gospels which hint at effort, and especially that quotation which Matthew makes from Isaiah, "Himself took our infirmities and carried our sicknesses." Matthew was a friend with a loving eye, and he saw how quickly these overcrowded days were making his Master old. Nothing was cheaply done by Jesus; His life was one continual offering of Himself in which nothing was kept back. And sometimes when we look at the work of redemption as a whole, our hearts are touched with awe at the thought of what it cost. There is a look not of effort only, but of agony: "It was damnation," cries John Duncan, "and He took it lovingly." But it is no unfamiliar thing in human life that man or woman should victoriously conceal a burdened heart; *secretum meum mihi* — the heart knows its own bitterness. A widowed mother with her children has her hidden depths of mournful recollection, fears and conflicts which are the heavier as she has no one to share them with her. But when she comes from her chamber in the morning her face bears no sign; it is part of her fidelity that there should be no sign, but brightness and cheer and mirth. And so it was with our Lord. The hilltops and the stars kept His secret; night by night He renewed that awful

consecration of Himself; but when the morning came, and human needs along with it, the burden of redemption was no longer visible but the joy of it. And to this day there is no effort in the operations of His grace. "Its touch," as Faber says, "is health, life, resurrection, immortality. Its sole touch is its sole work." The impression which Jesus made on His surroundings is conveyed in that exulting phrase, "As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole." His way through the world had something of the character of a triumphal procession of the powers of life and gladness, for wherever He came, people who scarcely knew by what name to call Him, hailed Him as One who was clearly adequate for His chosen task of helping men. So He journeyed from strength to strength; He drank of the brook in the way, welcoming refreshment as it came, and He went with lifted head.

"A picture should not only be done well," says Sir Joshua, "it should look as if it had been done easily." That is supremely true of God's work in the world, which has none of the oppressive sense of elaboration. "God's creatures in earth and air and water seem to revel in life as a joy which fills their natures to the brim." There is nothing of stint in the creation, as if the Creator had reached the limit of His power, but rather it looks as if there might be other worlds of a different make from ours. A Psalmist, in one quaint touch, utters his feeling that God is much at ease with His creation. "There go the ships," he says; "there is leviathan whom Thou hast formed to play with,"—the

hugest of creatures, untamed and unmanageable in our view, is a mere plaything to God. And that is greatly true in regard to the works of Jesus. There is no single act of His of which a man could say that here He had reached His limit; the most astounding of them was simply done, with a sense of wide space beyond it. That appears in the very tone in which miracles are recorded. It is never hectic or exclamatory, like most of the corresponding narratives about saint or prophet: the Evangelists write their story as if such things were to be expected from Him. The feeding of the five thousand, whatever it means, is set down in that placid scenery of green grass and free air beside the lake. The waterpots are filled at a word and the wine borne round the company, with nothing of arresting stupor or amazement. That is how Jesus struck His contemporaries; without closer definition He was one of such size that the most astounding works looked natural. "Said I not unto you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God," were His words to Matthew; and I think His bearing day by day spoke to the same effect, so that eyes followed Him sure that something great and new was close at hand.

And His words—do they ever seem to exhaust what was in Him? A man often speaks so as to make us suspect that, for the moment, he has uttered his last word, discharging into it all his cleverness and insight, so that beyond it he cannot go until life and learning have had their chance; but this Man's words came from a rich world within Him. He never gropes,

He never is unprepared. With sudden trenchancy of wisdom He speaks to the occasion, and the world is learning still from these extempore replies. He was fond of the image of a seed, which grows not poorer with time, as if to say—a true word grows truer the longer it is kept and the better it is understood; one truth opens out into other truths, and thus the mind, in which the first had found a welcome, becomes rich in its possession. "The seed is the word of God"—a single word but with such vast expansions; and He, from whom such sayings fell, stimulating, satisfying, profound, gave to His hearers the assurance of an inner world of truth and light, to which they could never come in vain.

The question has been sometimes raised whether we get the best measure of a man's size and wealth of nature from his deliberate work or his occasional. By iron diligence and economy of gift some men have written books of lasting worth; and yet another man who, from broken health, or preoccupation, or lack of method, has never found a full expression, may give you in his unconsidered talk and letters the sense that he is every way a bigger nature. He does not need to rack his brains or consult his library, he consults himself; and at every turn he flings you pearls of wisdom, or wit, or tenderness. The ease bears witness of the fulness; and it prepares you to expect that, when he has his chance, something great will be achieved. Such expectations are often disappointed: the parerga are better than the erga. But with Jesus

there is no such contrast; the words and works by the way are in the same direction, and they are tokens of the same gift as the final utterance upon the Cross. And thus we see Him, from the day of His appearing, travelling on towards the consummation with a kind of abundance and ease, giving assurance of One who is well able to perform what has been laid upon Him. "He marches in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save."

This first-hand impression of the bigness of Christ's nature led men far in these first days, and it still leads men who renew the ancient experience. They do not start with any clear conviction of what He is, but they acknowledge works in Him that are great, words that are deep and wonderful, and they see that He is always beyond the words; and thus they pass from stage to stage of apprehension, and see Him still going beyond them. These are regions in which we need not greatly concern ourselves, if some things pass our measures. "If we feel," says Dr. Denney, "that such a thought carries us suddenly out of our depth, that as the words fall on our minds we seem to hear the plunge of the lead into fathomless waters, we shall not for that imagine that we have lost our way. By these things men live, and wholly therein is the life of our spirits. We cast ourselves on them *because* they outgo us; and in their very immensity we are assured that God is in them." That is how men in these first days saw Jesus. They had no settled doctrine or interest in such, their minds were

held by a profound impression which they patiently sought to make clear; and when all was clear they said, "The Word was God."

The impression was not simply of bigness, for there is a certain tyrannical greatness which tends to bring men to silence, making them conscious of their own ignorance and awkwardness. Albrecht Dürer, on his grave, is called *cos ingeniorum*, the whetstone of men's wits, for, in his genial presence, dull and slow men talked their best; and if we may build on a single instance it seems as if Jesus also gave men a chance of appearing at their best. Mother-love and ready wit found voice in His presence, whose smile made a wilderness a homely place. But there is more than that; this woman was clearly an outsider, without any right or claim, and she found her ground of confidence in His face and in her own need. In some old-fashioned prayers a great part of the time was occupied with alleging reasons and titles for coming. Sure they did protest too much, and, in any evangelical sense, that was not Christian prayer at all. This woman, if she had been asked for her title, would have said, "I looked at Him, and I looked at myself, and that was title enough." That is evangelical prayer which pleads no other reason than that God is such as He is, and that I am such as I am. Even to seek about for some express promise which covers you, is a failure of faith. God does not answer because He has bound Himself to answer; the fact of His grace and of His readiness existed before the promise, and it

would be fact if there were no word at all. "With that, the thought of God came into my head," says George MacDonald, "and it seemed as if I had a *right* to call upon Him, I was so miserable." That is what Jesus welcomes, for His kingdom is taken by violence. Two men, in one of Victor Hugo's stories, talk of the ideal state of society, and one says, "I will give to each the share that belongs to him," and the other answers, "And then it will remain to give the share which does not belong to him." That ideal society is only found in the kingdom of God, which came into being when Jesus entered on His work, and men were emboldened by His look to lay hands on what did not belong to them, and to claim it as of right.

That is the image of Jesus which met the eyes of this heathen woman, and I wish that it could be restored to the Church of to-day. There is far too much fear of God in the world, a fear which makes us awkward, and our prayers stilted and untrue. The heart of God is like our own heart, only with divine deepness; that was what this woman dimly guessed at. If I have reserves of affection and help for people beyond the innermost circle, if my pity does not always measure claims but looks at need, how much more will His! Lord, help me, she cried; and she found what some of us have never learned, that we have a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and through whom blessings come that are worthy of Himself.

"HE THAT IS HOLY, HE THAT IS TRUE."

"And Zacchæus stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold."—LUKE xix. 8.

ANYONE who wishes to know how Jesus looked to His contemporaries will not turn to deliberate descriptions so much as to chance words spoken when men were off their guard. When His enemies said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners," they scarcely expected to be taken quite in earnest; it was enough for their purpose if the slander could discredit His cause even a little. But searching the slander more closely we gather from it the assurance of that brightness and geniality in Jesus which gained a welcome for Him in strange company. When a heathen woman, prompt and witty, said, "Truth, Lord; but the dogs about the house get scraps, at least," she meant in the first instance to push her plea and to catch at an advantage given her in talk; but again, without forcing the phrase, we catch in it a glimpse of the bigness and affluence of nature in Jesus which everywhere im-

pressed untutored folk. And in this abrupt announcement, with which Zacchæus breaks the silence, we cannot miss the reminder of the moral stringency of Jesus Christ, the Lord of men.

Think of the situation. Zacchæus was not able, like many offenders, to plead that he had begun his career amongst things creditable and honest, and had only later been drawn into associations which were degrading. It could not even be pled that, within his lifetime, common opinion as to the legitimacy of his calling had changed. The publican's business had always been infamous. A man who entered upon it took sides against his own people with the oppressor, and thus at once became an outcast. That was before Zacchæus' face when he made his choice. He saw how publicans were regarded, and how their characters were affected, and nothing but a cynical contempt for human nature and an exaggerated estimate of what money is worth could have drawn him to accept that reprobate trade. That was where he started, and a man beginning thus is not likely to advance in goodness much. Men are queer creatures, who seldom act from any single motive. They go to a religious assembly to see what it is like, as they say, and as they even tell themselves, but inwardly there is a kind of shy wonderment if, perhaps, some quite new experience may be waiting for them there; and it may be that something of that kind was present in this cynical and perverse man. Why he had come he could scarcely have told, and when the jeerings of the

crowd assailed him on the tree he wished himself anywhere else; but, to the amazement of the multitude and to his own bewilderment, he was singled out for recognition, and he and his self-invited guest passed on, beset by the whispering curiosity of the onlookers. In their opposite ways they were both outcasts, and few would have cared to face the world as the host of either. Suspicion was never far from Jesus, and it became acute when He made choice of such a companion. The shoutings for the Son of David died away, and they moved on, those two, fellows in the one point of general distrust, with their dusty following trailing after them. And then, without a word of preparation, out of a heart which had been groping for the right thing to say, there broke this: "The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I restore fourfold." That did not come in answer to some exhortation from Jesus, but from an instinctive sense of what was fitting. Zacchæus had not chosen his companion, but had been chosen by Him, yet at once he recognised the constraint of the new fellowship. "We know that when we see Him we shall be like Him," says John; and this man, at his lower level, felt the same,—he must be like Him.

On that story there is much that might be said. The Lord's own comment is that "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost," and Professor Davidson very grandly enlarges on the phrase. "He went on, restless and inquiring,

groping around all hearts, looking into all countenances as if for some lost friend of old, and when an unmeaning gaze met His own, turning away in disappointment and in sadness, . . . till at last, amidst some heaving crowd, He stood before a man, a publican, a sinner, and there flashed upon Him the joy of a discovery and a recognition." "Rejoice with Me," He would say, "for I have found My sheep which was lost!" In the record of every such incident there is the same note of gladness, and if you look into this story you will not wonder. For the man whom He has found is not the cynical husk of a man whom others had known, but a creature capable of the noblest impulses, a new man whom none can deny to be well worth saving. People talk too glibly of salvation, as if they knew what it means; but in this case we see all the wonder of it, the bringing of a worthless man to goodness, of one who had been detested and who deserved it to a real beauty of character. That is salvation, the birth of a new creature.

That great saint and leader of men, Catherine Booth, says in one of her letters (*Life*, ii. 309), "Do not let us be in too big a hurry to get people to say they believe. We will go in more and more for righteousness; I wish we could incorporate the word somehow in the Army's name." That means, of course, that she, with her unparalleled experience, had found that great word "salvation" so cheapened as almost to have lost its meaning, and that there was need of making it clear

that salvation contains the restoration to goodness. On the surface, the story speaks of the power of Christ to save the worst of men; but when searched more closely, it is peculiarly a witness to His moral stringency. What first impressed Zacchæus in his new Master was not His immeasurable grace but the clearness of His demand. Joy and wonder have their turn, but on that day righteousness had the first word. There were the gathered wrongs of years to be atoned for, and his mind went straight to that: I cannot be in His company even for a night, he felt, without attempting restitution to those whom I have defrauded.

1. Let me speak of Jesus' unspoken demand for righteousness. Preachers are apt in talking of the mercy of Jesus to forget that there is no mercy in allowing a mean and dishonourable man to go on in meanness; mercy to such a man requires that he should get the chance of escaping dishonour. And certainly that was near the heart of Jesus. There is scarcely any word in His teaching more tremendous than His parable concerning hearing and doing. There were two men, He says, of whom one built his house with a foundation and the other without a foundation (Luke vi. 49), one who took trouble with his life and raised it upon principle and character and self-control, and another who fancied that a flush of emotion and limitless good intentions were enough. Both wanted to build, realising their need of shelter; but the one wanted a shelter cheap and soon, whilst the other was content to dig and to keep deepening (Luke vi. 48),

and so the house stood a monument of faithful effort. It is not effort which saves a man; but when God comes to you with the offer of His saving help, you must not meet Him simply with an excited sense of something to be done. You must bring to Him all in you that is serious and deep, for if many have fallen from God who have risen near to Him it is because they laid hold of Him with their weakness not with their strength. Their answer was a flutter of excitement, a cry of "Lord, Lord," not a serious determination of the will, not the settled purpose of obedience. When men are awakened, there is a vehemence of self-renunciation which has often attained to the pitch of agony, and hell itself has been made credible by the sentences of exclusion given in conscience. A heart aroused begins to ask great things of itself, and judges without pity of its own failures; and this man felt that in Jesus there was a power which searched and exposed his weakness, and he felt that he could not take another step along the street until he had answered that demand.

I think it may be said that Jesus is not fully known apart from this, for a Lord who saves and yet leaves men careless about evil habits is not the Lord who, in the Garden and on the Cross, had travail and doubt of soul because of sin. For suffering, Jesus had a true compassion, but He knew that it could be borne; what was intolerable, because it was daily robbing men of life, was this habit of evil, and against that He daily measured Himself. And a friend, picturing Him in

His glory to the men of another generation, spoke of His eyes like a flame of fire, searching, exposing, challenging. It was for that reason that men besought Him to depart out of their coasts. Like their neighbours, they loved a sensation, and would naturally have welcomed a teacher of such charm and a companion who brought health and bread in His train; but they shrank in confused dismay from One who, without a word, had the gift of exposing men to themselves, for they did not like to admit that they had no religion of their own. He made them uncomfortable, and so they drove Him from them. Yes, there was in Jesus this element of the inexorable. He forgave sin, but no one ever supposed that He thought slightly of it, or that, even for a moment, He became less absolute in His demands. There is much in the Gospels to confirm the unconscious witness of this man to the clearness of Christ's requirement; if I am to be in His company, I must make up my mind to break with what I have long admitted.

There is no need more imperious in the evangelical preaching of to-day than the recalling of this neglected truth. Modern evangelism has not won credit to itself on this point of morals. Ruskin tells of a knave who had ruined many homes by his dishonest practice, and started afresh without a thought of restitution, and snuffled that he took "the way of the publican,"—as if a word alone could right so deep a wrong. There is constant danger of moral sophistication in the Augustinian doctrine of sin, which has gone so far

beyond the Pauline. A man may dwell on sin in an abstract and theological way; he may brood over it, and magnify, and deplore it, until he is much surer of sin than of forgiveness. But, with all his intense preoccupation with it, he does not set about abandoning it, and without that, the other is a mere disease of feeling. Zacchæus said, Whatever grasping or dishonest deed I have done I propose, so far as I can, to undo; where I have gone as a knave and extortioner, I now propose to go as an honest man; if my character has told against goodness, I wish it now to tell for goodness. And Jesus hailed him in that mood as a son of Abraham, chivalrous and magnificent. Repentance is not exhausted in a man's secret transactions with God. It is not turning the page, for it carries in its bosom the resolve, at any cost of humiliation or effort, to set things right. "We must go in more and more for righteousness," said Catherine Booth.

There could be no better medicine for the relaxed moral nerve of the evangelical Churches than a return to Jesus Christ, with His scourge of cords and His lifted hand. It was not sin in a theological sense against which He strove, but selfishness, ostentatious pietism, injustice, and pretence, and with these He made no terms at all. Whatever view we take of His words about the future doom there can be no doubt as to the condition which He lays down: "Thou shalt not depart thence until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Salvation is a big thing, and it is not possible so long as there is any shirking of the moral

issue. Jesus would not be the minister of the love of God who wishes only the good of His creatures, if He spread the screen of a vague and sentimental pardon over an inner world of moral uncertainty. There *is* forgiveness with Him; but the possibility of it rests upon a sincere dealing with our faults—His sincerity, who sees them as they are, but also our sincerity. "It is because we know the terror of the Lord," says Paul, "that we persuade men." The terror does not necessarily come before the love, but the love can scarcely be made perfect without knowledge of the terror. Zacchæus had only made his Lord's accquaintance a few minutes before, but he caught at what is central: If this new fellowship is to last, I have bonds to break and wrongs to set right. And thus he entered on the way in which Christ helps His friends, with a heart unfettered.

2. Of Christ's way of presenting this demand for righteousness. It is clear that He did not preach much in the line of mere moral exhortation, and in this case He does not seem to have pointed out to Zacchæus the course which he ought to pursue. Decisions of that sort He always left to a man himself. The demand was presented in a far more subtle and convincing fashion. Wordsworth speaks of "truth breathed by cheerfulness," a phrase which suggests that without a certain joyous wholesomeness of nature a man never sees things truly and sanely; and it was in silent ways like that that Jesus made His demand felt. When men came into His society, they found Him and His friends

talking frankly and naturally of things beyond the common reach, and not only talking but doing them without a touch of strain or pose, and insensibly the new-comers underwent a change. Jesus had brought them into a different atmosphere, where other levels of thought and feeling were attainable. Where they had been, little had been asked of them, and all their human aspirations and discontents were like to be put to sleep. But now they had come into a society in which everyone was endeavouring something high. Each expected something of his brother, and the Master looked for more than any even from the weakest. These were the surroundings which Jesus created for His servants. He did not believe in working *legally*, by precept, and admonition, and scolding, but *vitally*, by the expulsive power of a new affection and a new environment. He did not lose Himself in them, coming to their level, thinking their mean and selfish and timorous thoughts; He inclined them to lose themselves in Him, taking colour from their new surroundings, thinking His thoughts, and living in His way.

That is one chief point of difference between Jesus and His forerunner; for John, in his clamorous way, called men to repentance in the world which they knew, where all the hindrances were sorrowfully familiar, and made any lasting change improbable. The motives to which he appealed were powerful, but they were entirely motives of this world, like fear and self-preservation. John was a great moral nature, and

by sheer impetus he worked astonishing results with such poor tools; but repentance, on the level of this present world, is of little worth. So Jesus called men to repentance not in the known world of powers and motives, but in a wonderful, new world which embraces the old as a little part of it. He took a man up into the privilege of His friendship, welcomed him, honoured him, talked to him as if he were fit for something; and the man, looking over the things which had detained and tempted him as from some higher level of life, felt that he had no choice, but must leave the sin or he would lose the fellowship.

John set repentance before faith. Put your fault away, he said, cease from extortion, disorder, impurity, and then you will see the kingdom of God. But Jesus put faith first; the kingdom in all its benignity and authority, the kingdom in the power of the King, laid hold of a man, and he felt it good, and repentance followed as of course. Zacchæus had the habit of a lifetime to reform, and before him there lay a work of humiliating restitution; what could bear him through in a task like that? Well, there was the power of this stringent, invigorating companionship which made goodness seem natural, and the friendship was so incredible and so blessed a thing that to maintain it any sacrifice was easy. That is still the way of Christ; and all who have the task of teaching others must learn to present Him in the power and the simplicity of His nature that men may be drawn to Him. "We know," says the Apostle, "that when He shall be made

manifest we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." It is the clear sight of Jesus which makes men good. It is fellowship with that living Person, who is yesterday and to-day and for ever the same, which gives men perfect soundness in their moral nature.

REDEMPTION AS AN EXPERIENCE.

"And behold, a woman who was in the city, a sinner; and when she knew that Jesus was sitting at meat in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and, standing behind at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment."—LUKE vii. 37, 38.

HOW can one fitly speak of an incident so high and passionate as this? Here is a scene in which mere decorum was forgotten, and the heart found its voice for once; how can people judge of it who are afraid to do anything that is unusual because of what their neighbours will say? The outward course of events, the dramatic part, is plain enough. The woman, as the vessel in her hand declares, has come there for a purpose; she has dared to face the men who knew her in order to anoint this man, Jesus of Nazareth, as a king might be anointed, spending what was costliest of her possession on Him who was sovereign Lord in her renovated life. She knew something of the look of chill contempt and repulsion which would meet her, but it proved worse than she had imagined; and when she actually stood within the room,

though she was a reckless creature who had often laughed at the sour looks of decent people, she stood abashed, not knowing what to do next. She was on the threshold of a new existence, where all ways were strange to her feet, and even common things were hard to do. But as she hung there, doubting, her heart brimmed over and a tear fell on His feet, making her the more ashamed, and another, and another, which she wiped away as they dropped, until her plan, in its intended dignity, broke down, and, hiding her face, she did what she could. The succession of events is clear, but what of the meaning?

In the most elementary sense it meant that her life, by some strange power, had been broken across, and that in her soul she was making a new start; and in that end of the old and in the possibility of the new, Jesus of Nazareth counted for everything. She came there, driven by a sense of infinite indebtedness. These tears were not of sorrow but of quite immeasurable gladness, for her winter was past, the frosts were gone, and the ice-bound waters running free; life was springing afresh within her, and the time of the singing of birds had come. In a word, this woman had experienced redemption; and her action meant that the power which had loosed her and was now renewing life within her came from Jesus Christ. That is a great confession, and it is by no means so common as it should be in the Churches which bear the Christian name. So much of our goodness is taken from the example of others, or from the vaguely wholesome

constraint of a Christian society, that we may forget that the fire which burns in our hearts is fire from off the altar, and thus there may be lacking altogether the overmastering sense of debt to Jesus Christ. So it is good for us to look at this record and consider what it means. What had Jesus done to this woman and to others of her kind?

1. In the first place, He helped them by His mere appearing. When He came, men were disposed to acquiesce, as we do, in their own habits as fences over which they could not escape. The expectation of most men about themselves and about their neighbours is that what they are, they are likely to remain. "He that is holy let him be holy still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still." Men are better and worse, but even the best are hampered by the sense of the difficulty of change. After some quickening impulse we may live for a while at a higher pitch, but when the impulse exhausts itself, we discover that the gleam which cheered us has lighted up the chambers of the soul, it has not made them bigger. A man seems to have his measure, and by no amount of taking thought can he change what he is. As in Bunyan's allegory, men carry a burden on their back which depresses courage in them, sending them out to any fresh endeavour half convinced that they will make little of it.

But into a world thus depressed and ready for defeat, where the burden of yesterday was lying upon every back, making to-day more difficult, there came this Man, in whom was no act or taint of sin. Good men com-

monly know so much of evil in themselves that they become anxious and suspicious, surer of temptation than of the grace which masters it; and the outcast people of Christ's day had only known that shadowed type of goodness, always on guard, and they were astonished by a goodness altogether radiant, sunny, and triumphant. Here was One who took His way without any look of conflict, who did the most wonderful things as if nothing else were conceivable, and who actually called on them to do the same. Other good men had expected them to be bad, though in a dutiful fashion they spoke of the doom that waits for sinners, but this Man expected them to be good. He talked to them of His high plans, and seemed to reckon on their sympathy, and thus He gave to goodness a new attraction, and made them think about themselves in a different way. They had been taking second bests for bests, it appeared; what they had reckoned goodness, and had not greatly fancied, was only an inferior imitation. They had been living in a land where there were no mountains, nothing to catch their eyes and draw their souls up to high things; but when He came, life changed its face, becoming bigger, more hopeful, more victorious at once. No wonder they were grateful even for His coming!

2. But still more He helped by what He gave; and of that John gives a curious symbol when he says that "Jesus breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Spirit." That was meant to suggest, as Seeley notes, that "life could pass and must pass out of His

soul into their souls; any power, any gladness, any clearness which they attained was somehow His first. That is the way in which life advances, passing into the soul of a man by contagion from another living soul." It was not enough that men should admire and rejoice in Jesus as a new type of goodness, rich in promise for all the world of men, there must be some imparting to them of what was His. And they felt it so, they *experienced* redemption. The man who had been blind began to see, and he who had been fettered stretched his limbs, discovering joyfully that he was free. New thoughts, desires, capacities revealed themselves within them; and it was the Lord who had done it. Generally when men talk of redemption they begin in the region of theology, amongst principles and truths and arguments, which may all be weighty, but interest in them is not redemption, and may never lead us to it. Many people call Jesus the Redeemer because they count it respectful and orthodox to do so, but they do not know what it is to be redeemed. They call Him Lord, and feel safe in doing so because He died centuries ago and cannot ask anything of His servants. That is what comes of beginning with words instead of with things.

When a man hears God saying to him, "I am thy salvation," and has received the word as true, he finds that the conditions of life have entirely changed. The world is the same; but out of the loom and whirl of things and persons a new Figure has emerged, so great as to dwarf all others. God is his Friend; and with that,

insecurity departs, and he comes into a kingdom of certainties, in which he is encompassed by all things that are strong. He knows that he cannot perish, that trouble and fear themselves can work for good, and that, since God is his possession, he can never be poor. After a lifetime of straining after some uncertain goal, he suddenly feels that he has arrived. The reality of redemption, as Weinel says, is to feel oneself in heaven, at rest, and safe, and blessed, whereas, in other ways, a man has felt how far he has been from rest. Our redemption does not stand in feeling, which is the most variable of things; but without feeling, or, rather, without something that can be felt, a man will never attach the proper meaning to redemption. And it is this assurance of redemption, this joy of those who have got home, which Jesus gives to His own.

Think of what redemption meant to such a woman as the subject of this story. She had spoiled her life; all the sweetest things—love, and home, and honour, and quietness—she had made impossible. Passion had flared up in her for a while, but it had spent itself, and disgust and weariness remained. God, in so far as she thought of Him, was a name of dread; and past and present and future were thus alike disquieting. She lived, because the obstinate mechanism of life ran on, which takes such a deal of breaking, but life itself she did not know. And Jesus brought God to her in such a way as she could understand. She was a frail creature, who had found her place in the town amongst the evil-doers; never strong in will, she had been

lazy, self-indulgent, vain, catching at the pleasure of to-day and leaving to-morrow to itself. What chance was there for such a woman, after the fleeting emotion had passed, of bearing up against the impulses of her baser nature, against the example of her surroundings, and against the relentless necessities of bread? Happily the question did not arise in such a form. The power of a new affection laid hold upon her, and she did not ask what she was able to attempt, she looked to see what He expected of her. He became to her another conscience, and by Him she measured thought, desire, duty for herself, so that in her the life of Jesus was repeated, His words spoken after Him, His thoughts renewed, His deeds of kindness carried farther. For her, as for anyone, that new existence was entirely wonderful. Impossible things looked natural and near; cleanness, honour, help to other sinners were within *her* reach, who had been lowest, and her past was blotted out. And she felt that Jesus was not only the door of entrance into the life, He somehow was the life itself, for there was nothing in it that was not His. "He breathed on them"—that is the reality of redemption: something of Christ passing over to us, making the world new to us and us new to the world.

Peter says that men are "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ from a heartless way of living"—not from things glaringly bad as this woman was, but from the fascination of a life empty and shallow. Man is a great creature, with eternity in his heart, needing for his life's expansion both depth and space, and he cannot

get it. He runs from disenchantment to disenchantment, nothing giving him all it promised, until one day, at a word, the curtains are drawn back, and he sees things which are really worth the having, and he knows that they are his. He is redeemed; the old life, with its restriction, falls away, and the new opens before him. The difference is wrought by meeting with Jesus Christ, and the new life is simply the result of powers which reside in Him, and which He bestows on us. "It's a coal off God's altar which must kindle our fire."

Jesus sought out men who were willing to receive. From the prosperous and the proud He had scant welcome, but the broken and dejected, who had little choice of friends, caught eagerly at the promise of His presence. And in them His work appeared like another resurrection, goodness reasserting itself, brightness and comfort appearing, thoughts and words and hopes of Jesus ruling now in His poor servants. No wonder they were ready to fall at His feet, who, by some power of nature, had given them themselves.

3. But it cost Him something, and it is this which has always spoken home to the hearts of men. He gave me myself, and that is a great debt, but it was through giving Himself for me.

In the Gospels we repeatedly come upon traces of the extraordinary impression of ease and fulness which Jesus made, as of one who could well discharge all the tasks that were thrust upon Him; but we must not forget the other impression of labour and agony which sometimes awed even careless onlookers. On His last

pilgrimage, Mark tells that "those who went with Him were astonished and afraid." At Lazarus' grave that trouble broke in passionate tears; and again and again we have hints of tremendous reactions of soul when the tide ran back, and it seemed impossible to Him that the world could really be redeemed. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, so that I could even die," He said when He reached the Garden. It was natural that *men*, with their blunter sense, should miss the greater part of this, and it may be that the narrators give less place to this aspect of the ministry than was due. Matthew notes it when he records miracles of healing, for he saw that the burden which Jesus lifted from any heart seemed to be bound upon His own.

But certainly women, with their quick, pitying sense, could not miss that aspect of His work; what came to them was at cost to Himself. "It was not," says Dr. Denney, "for a forgiveness with which He had nothing to do that they poured their precious ointment on His head and wet His feet with tears. No, but in the depths of their being they had the dim sense of His passion in their pardon, and were conscious of an obligation to Him which they could never repay." They knew what His defiance of common custom involved; they knew how hatred was gathering up against Him, and that what meant everything to them was death to Him. And it well may be that some of these passionately grateful women were the first to catch at the meaning of those hints, which the disciples stubbornly would not receive, and to believe that the

Cross waited for Him and was near. Perhaps, indeed, that is intended in the word with which He defended Mary from the censure of her friends, "She has done it for My burial." I wonder if at that moment a look of understanding passed from Master to servant: "Yes, we know, you and I, what is at hand, and you have come to prepare Me as I prepare Myself in other ways." How definite this was we cannot tell, but I think they had some foreboding of the passion to make their love the greater. They saw that His life was utterly surrendered and for them. He stood as source and as security of their new life, but He stood not in His almightiness but in self-emptying and in a deepening poverty. For our sakes, they said, He is becoming poor.

This woman has had her followers in all the generations since, who have judged like her what they owe to Christ. What she brought was not, to her feeling, adequate, only it was all she had, and she brought it gladly; for when anyone has experienced the redemption he does not stay to count or measure. There is no worse sign of man or of community than that the utterance of the heart should be depressed, and everything be frigid and decorous. There must be some great answer to that great love, and thus men are found offering themselves to God. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" said Paul; and all his days on to the end, were too short to express his sense of what he had received.

GIVING HIM THE RIGHT PREDICATE.

"Now when Jesus came into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say, John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."—MATT. xvi. 13–16.

JESUS had now come in a sense to the end of His public ministry. The acceptable year in Galilee had been accomplished, and more and more He withdrew Himself from action in order to prepare Himself for the suffering which must come next. He had poured out His heart to these countrymen of His, by word and act labouring to show them what He meant, and He had found a welcome, as we know. Crowds had gathered, work was left undone, and hunger itself was forgotten, as the people chased after the new Teacher, in His sudden movements and escapes about the Lake. It looked as if they were won for His cause; but very early He felt that the mournful experience of Isaiah was being repeated, and that all His speaking was confirming them in their not hearing. He was a master of the people's talk, living, concrete,

pictorial; and when we read His parables to-day, in spite of the difference which parts His world from ours, His thought leaps out and commands our understanding. It was so He intended it. He felt that He could not speak more plainly, and yet on one occasion He was driven sorrowfully to say, It seems as if My use of parable had only given you an excuse for not understanding, "for the heart of this people is waxen gross, and their ears are dull, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn, and I should heal them." In a little while the crowds fell away. There was more of criticism and less of expectation, so that in the end He was driven back on silence; and up there in the north, amidst the splendours of that hill country, with a people largely pagan, He sought the medicine of quiet.

That chapter of the ministry was as good as closed, and though as yet He had not talked of it, He knew what the next chapter must be. To all men life is sacred; and when He realised that His way led southwards into the midst of that misunderstanding and hostility, who can wonder that there were movements of revulsion and recoil? It was the question which had faced Him at the temptation, only in the meanwhile He had known the soreness of desertion, which did not make decision easier. He was done with the crowd; He had no faith now in the effect of these multitudinous appeals, for His work must grow by the mastering of individuals: so much was clear. But

there is a long interval between belief in the parable of the leaven, which silently affects all that is about it, and an acceptance of the Cross; and to strengthen Him for this bitter way He sought for some assurance that He had not wasted every word upon the air. It was thus the question came, a life or death question; and when the right answer leaped out to meet Him, His mind travelled forward, in a flash, to matters which had lain beyond the range of all His talk before. "Give me a place to stand on," said Archimedes, "and I will move the world;" and Jesus said in effect, Give Me one man who believes, and, with that secure, My Church shall rise and stand eternal. "And from that day He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected and be killed." He was no longer afraid to speak of ugly and repulsive things, for He knew that these lay on the way which He was taking to the throne. The strange story of the transfiguration tells all those who can read what this new departure in Christ's teaching meant for the disciples. From the moment at which He was able to talk, open-eyed and unflinching, of His own decease, He rose up upon their sense diviner and more radiant, until they ceased even to think about Moses and Elijah and the other teachers. For them there could now be no master save the One.

Whom do they take Me for? asked Jesus; do you meet anyone to whom My meaning has grown plain? "It is a supreme matter," says Stier, "to be able to give to Jesus the proper predicate."

1. First of all, the disciples reported a recognition which Jesus took as of small account: "Some call Thee John the Baptist, and some Elijah, and some Jeremiah or one of the prophets." For an ambitious man there might be a lawful satisfaction in being thus associated with the heroes of his race; but to Jesus the catalogue of suggestions spoke of nothing but the common lack of insight. "We admire by tradition," says Landor; that is to say, we admire what we have been told to admire. There is nothing so rare in the world as the independent possession of eyes, and the people who made these guesses about Jesus were no worse endowed than most of ourselves. Vaguely they saw men like trees walking, and amongst them was One so dim and huge that they felt that they required their greatest words to describe Him at all. That is not the worst kind of error, but it is not a recognition which Jesus thought sufficient.

For one thing, these guesses spoke, as clearly as the frankest rejection could have done, of His failure to make Himself understood, for they were wholly out of character. If any chatterer had been ill-advised enough to say to Browning that his poetry was delightfully like Pope's, the poet would scarcely have been flattered; and those who fancied that they were exalting Jesus by saying that He was like John the Baptist fell into the same snare, for two figures with fewer points of contact it would be hard to imagine. The one was the prophet of the axe and the fire, who took it as his business in the world to press on to the

consummation, and who thought that God could only come to judge and to consume; whilst the Other was the prophet of the leaven and the seed, who looked to the long result, who did not quench the smouldering wick, and who believed that all God's comings mean salvation. The one was ascetic, gaunt, and lean, whilst the Other sat at men's tables and shared the talk, and drew children about Him to play. Or, think of Elijah and Jesus! Jeremiah, that image of sacrifice at its noblest and of hope, was a guess not so wildly out of character; but in them all Jesus read the assurance that the inner meaning of His words and deeds had passed them by. He had taught that the kingdom of God was not coming, as John said, but had come, and that wherever relief was given to a tormented human creature there the kingdom was at work. That was what He wanted them and wants us to recognise; and they answered Him by associating Him in their minds with the great, stormy figures of judgment, which thronged their tumultuous visions of God's kingdom.

But there was another objection to these guesses. They all meant that men saw in Jesus nothing else than some notable historical character come to life again. That is to say, they saw in Him something which the world had known and tried before; and their words implied that all they owed to Him was something which might be derived from other sources. That is an objection which goes to the root of the faith of many. "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"

Why this pother about Jordan? this eagerness to make Jesus alone in the earth? Here let us make three tabernacles, said Peter. But other men must be allowed their liberty of choice, and thus the hilltop which marks the elevation of Christ's nature will in time be crowded like a town. Some people find interest in these resemblances and associations,—Jesus and Socrates, Jesus and the Buddha, Jesus and Moses, —but the association does not go far down. Abana and Pharpar are God's rivers too, and He is not jealous of what He has made. There is room within His Providence for all; but we need to remember that Jesus is not honoured by a resounding name. He prays that our eyes may be opened to see what He and He only is.

2. And thus I come to speak of the recognition which He does desire. Jesus was never greatly concerned with the admiration which comes by tradition, and to call Him the Christ because others do is not much better than to call Him Jeremiah for the same reason. It was partly for the sake of the disciples that He had come to that emptier land, away from the crowd, with its irrational impulses of enthusiasm and hope and disappointment. He was jealous for His friends, that no man and no thing should hinder them from the free possession of their own souls, and in that solitude they had a chance of thinking and speaking for themselves.

Suppose Jesus came to us with the same question, we could probably give better answers as to the

opinions current about Him, for the world is always learning; but in a moment He would set all these aside and say, But what of your own eyes? What have you to say from yourself concerning Me? The disciples deserve our sympathy, for they had no guiding precedent. No human lips had dared as yet to confess Jesus as the Christ. The Baptist, in his prison, when his own work of thunder and alarm had fallen to nothing, had begun to speculate, and he dared to send his friends to ask Jesus if it *could* be that He was Himself the Christ. That is a masterpiece of unassisted faith, there is nothing like it in the whole New Testament, and the heart of Jesus kindled as He spoke of the broken man. "Of those that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." But even to John, a man of genius and a man already inhabiting the land which lies far out towards the other world—even to John it was only a huge perhaps.

But now, through Peter, the mouth of the apostolic company, it was declared, for the first time, that Jesus was the Christ, a new thing in this aged earth, for which the whole world of men had been longing. Prophets and poets had seen Him in their dreams, and sweet souls, cleansed by time and trouble and prayer, like Mary, and Anna, and the shepherds, had loved Him in their hearts; and in far lands, where Jehovah and His altars were unknown, eyes had watched the stars for a sign, and minds had searched the secrets, and hope had grown and died, and grown

again. "The Christ of God;"—there is a gulf without a bridge between that recognition of Jesus as a new thing in the world, the one new thing, and any thought of Him as a historical personage come to life again. Where once the thought has risen that Jesus is without precedent or parallel, provision must be made for an element of surprise. If He is the Christ, not one of a series but Himself, then the past has no right to hamper Him. The new thing will take its own way, develop its own life, discover its own fulness. If it does what was not anticipated, that will only be according to its nature. The past has no measures adequate to this great event; and after nineteen hundred years of time, it doth not yet appear what we shall be—or what He shall be.

It is not an easy matter to recognise a new thing. It requires a certain freshness and daring of spirit, and thus it is peculiarly the achievement of those whose hearts are young. "Lo, this is new," cry the young; but the old, jealous of their longer experience of the world, answer, "Lo, it is that which hath already been under the sun." If a man has accustomed himself to lean upon authorities, his books and precedents become like crutches, without which he cannot walk at all. Peter, happily, had no books, for they do not help men far in their apprehension of Jesus; but he dared to call Him the Christ, because he felt that He had somehow made a fresh beginning in His servant's life. This neighbour, a poor man's son, poorer than himself, had made life new for Peter

so that he exclaimed, "To whom shall we go but unto Thee? for Thou hast words of eternal life." It needs a young heart, with freshness and spring still in it, however grey the head may be, to judge like that; for these things are "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes."

It is interesting to note that Peter was not suffered to rest in this confession as complete. What he had said was welcome to the heart of Jesus, who saw in it the promise of a Church against which the gates of the unseen should not prevail. But, great as the confession was, it needed supplementing, and, we read, "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be killed." It is surely impressive that just when Peter had dared to speak of his Master's glory as the Christ, he was on the eve of seeing a Christ greater yet, for he had to learn that Jesus, seen apart from the Cross, is a Jesus robbed of half His radiance and command. We must never think because we know the orthodox statements about Him, that they conclude the matter, and we must study to maintain in our hearts the sense of expectation in presence of an object new and blessed and unexhausted. To-day has its confession which He Himself asks of us, and in which He sees one token more that His work has not been vain, but there are other lessons and fresh applications. We may hope with every year to be able, with a richer understanding, to answer Him when He says, Whom say *ye* that I am? Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

PEACE—IN HIS WOUNDS.

"Peace be unto you ; and when He had so said, He showed them His hands and His side."—JOHN XX. 19–20.

A GREAT soul can redeem his words from triviality. He takes the most conventional expressions, the small change of ordinary courtesy, which on the lips of other men mean nothing, and in his mouth they have such heart and substance that you go on cheered and bettered by his greeting. "Peace" is one of the anointed words which hold rank in human speech by native dignity, but in Palestine it had been degraded to the level of a customary civility, with which the most indifferent acquaintances met and parted. And Jesus takes the word, humbled and impoverished, and makes such use of it that it is no longer trivial but has the force of a command for their hearts.

It was, probably, in that very room that He had said, "My peace I give unto you," and the word had been remembered because it seemed to fight with all the facts. It was His last word before He led them out on the way to Gethsemane, to that night of

confusion and alarm, and on through the bewilderment of the trial, and the growing uproar of the loud city, to the horror of Calvary, and the end. In a city given up to fanatical pilgrims, what man could have peace? Not Pilate, who felt the ground heaving under him, and wondered when there would be eruption; not the priests, who favoured an uprising but were in terror lest it should come too soon; not the pilgrims, who had left the very possibility of quietness behind them at their homes, and were there lost in the crowd, moved by all the blind impulses that ran through it; and certainly not the disciples, gathered behind shut doors, and conscious of a whole world of frenzy in the streets which might tear them limb from limb at a hint. "My peace I give unto you," He had said, and it had lived in their ears like deep irony. And now, when they sat in gloomy silence, with their sorrow, and their peril, and thoughts of the empty future making peace impossible, He comes again with His former word. It was a time when the common greeting might well have sounded like a wrong; peace—when there is no peace and cannot be! But Jesus Christ, whose words are living creatures, calls them back from all such petulance. In its fullest latitude He meant His word, and thus made trial of their faith; for peace was there, indeed, within their reach, if only they had courage to lay hands upon it. And in our disquiets the Lord speaks to us in the same way, and we shall gain or miss the help of His presence according as we deal with the promise of His word.

1. What gave and gives it worth is the nature of Him who spoke it. Coming from another, it would have been a vague good wish, a call not wholly to lose heart, and in face of such overwhelming calamities it would have been as idle to sustain their courage as the whistling of a scared country boy in the dark. But when Jesus uttered it, He brought a new element into the situation; for in His presence it was by no means impossible to be brave in spite of odds, which was, indeed, the lesson they had been studying for years. If their Master was with them they were not afraid; and therefore, as we read in Luke, He said, "Behold My hands and My feet *that it is I myself.*" Where He was they had learned to find the stronger cause.

At first they had sometimes feared that He had reached His limit, but as His power and wisdom were approved in new conditions their faith grew surer, and they came, at last, with a noble instinct, to put fear away when He was in their company. Their minds were inundated with a flood of questions which might well perplex, but when He was with them they could not doubt that there was an answer. Duty had assumed another face, and now seemed calling them out from the safe, travelled paths; but when He was with them they did not seem engaged in mere adventure. They touched lepers, they broke the Sabbath law, and were guilty of a hundred audacities with a quiet mind, because He was in the same condemnation. On the skirts of the crowd they saw men of consequence who were not there to learn; and

when His words cut like swords, and scowling looks and muttered threats revealed the danger, they might well have been alarmed. But no stronger proof of the hold which Jesus had upon them could be given than the fact that they never thought of His defeat as even possible. The priests and lawyers, the rich and learned and noble might take up arms against Him, but the disciples took so little account of these, that with a sort of childish vanity, they speculated as to which of them would hold the place of honour on the day of His enthronement. There was something petty in that, but there was nobility also; their trust was so unswerving as to leave no place for fear. All is well, they felt, because He is with us, and nothing counts in opposition to Him. Even when their boat was like to be driven under in a squall, they felt that Jesus needed only to lift a hand and there would be calm. No wonder John could say of men who read events in such a spirit, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." The load was off their heart, they had no further need for shut doors, since the stronger cause was theirs. And that is still part of the homage which Christian men owe to their Lord.

But it was not merely the Christ whom they had known, but a Christ with a new title to their trust and honour, who stood before them. "He showed them His hands and His feet," and thus He took them back to His Cross and gave them courage there. There are many things in Jesus Christ which we cannot understand, mysteries of nature and relation in which He

seems to withdraw Himself as we press on to know, but in the wounds of Christ there is nothing that is not plain. He said to Mary when she would have clasped His feet, "Touch Me not," but Thomas was invited to touch where the nails had pierced, on which Pascal makes the comment, "It is only in His wounds that you can touch Him." For there is discovered all His mind towards men. He would not let Himself be parted from them, but entered into experiences which were not His own. He suffered as the guilty suffer though His soul was white. He suffered because the guilty suffer, and are left by men to eat the fruit of their ill-doings. There is in the world a law of retribution from which no man escapes; he cannot strike a blow which does not somehow come back upon himself. When he kills a neighbour something in his own heart dies; when he steals he does not gain but loses in the real accounting. And men, knowing that, have endeavoured in the penalties of law to make outward and visible what the guilty man has worked for, and to leave him groaning under the weight of that. Serve him right, men say, and Jesus did not deny that it was right; only He was grieved in heart for the wretched who were left to what they had deserved. He wished to bring in a better law than that of retribution, to give a man what he had not worked for. As they were bearing what they had deserved, He accepted what He had not deserved in order to be their companion, and the dying thief is only one example of those who in the suffering Christ have found assurance for themselves.

Here is One who has come to my help, One who would not let my disgrace and ill desert condemn me; He is in a punishment which is mine and not His, and He is in it because it is mine, that where I might have looked only for despair and abandonment I should find a friend. "We are in the same condemnation," said that wise thief; "and we, indeed, justly, but this Man hath done nothing amiss. Lord, remember me!"

The wounds of Jesus speak to us of a love which would not be turned aside even by what was odious and degrading, and found a way to help the worst of men. The disciples had known the help of their Master's presence before; but when they looked to His wounds they recognised the strain which His heart had borne in making common cause with them, and they were persuaded that nothing now could separate from the love of Christ. The wounds of Jesus leave no place for fear.

But there is a point even beyond that: in reminding them of His death He declared that death was overcome. He had risen on their reverent trust stage after stage, as they had proved His power. A Teacher sent from God—whose every word rose up from some hidden depth of certitude, for whom there were no perplexities or obscurities, but who spoke at all times with authority. A Master in the world of conduct, who was bold to bind and to loose, and who claimed for Himself authority on earth to forgive sin. A true Lord in the house of life—who, in the most desperate malady, spoke, and the sickness yielded. A Physician of souls

—who probed, and understood, and restored. Was there any sphere in which He was not Master? It looked as if there was, and their hope, which had soared so high, fell like a shot bird when He breathed out His life: "We trusted that this was He that should have redeemed Israel." Now, it is much in our disquiets to have, like them, a great sense of Christ's pre-eminence, and to learn as they did that His heart accepts no limits, but if His power has limits! If there are conditions in which He cannot help, and threats against which He has no defence! If our Lord and we together must go down before a force which is stronger yet than He, then there is no sure peace. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read of "those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage," and that fear may stand for all the powers of the shadow which threaten life; and Christ's work is yet unfinished, so long as such outlying fears remain.

But He had come that night in the fulness of the glory of His resurrection. "He had passed from the state of sorrow, suffering, sacrifice, agony, and shame into the eternal peace of heaven." He had fought His fight, He had mastered all the oppositions, and now, with nothing lying unsubdued, He speaks of peace. Even on the human level, there is help in the settled quiet of a man who has reached beyond the ever troubled region of uncertainty. He has had struggle and perplexity, but now he has climbed to the high uplands where light is clear; and the tone of assured

courage in his voice and the unfeigned goodwill that gleams in his eye is a medicine to the heart. Through him, men know that there is a victory, and they are bold to try again. And Jesus, who has risen out of the shadow of earth, speaks to us where we are of what He has attained. He does not end the struggles which are our education, He does not clear the doubts away through which we must come to certitude; but in His peace and victory there is promise of our own. "Because I live," He says, "ye shall live also." "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." That is the peace which He bestows, rooted in His own achievement.

2. I can only add a word or two on the variety of this peace, which touches every part of life. On that night the men were held by a kind of panic. As events proved, the leaders of the nation had no thought of persecution. The movement was insignificant, living only in its Leader, and when He was gone its hope had vanished. But it was not yet the time for measuring probabilities. Danger seemed to beat at the door; they were two or three against a nation, and life in such conditions must needs be narrow, anxious, unexpectant. They might draw together to cherish a fond memory, but more than that they could not hope for; so the first gift which Jesus had for them was the high confidence in their cause. Without that a Christian life cannot well be lived. He does not mean that we should live by sufferance, creeping timidly under the shadow of men's example; we are to have eyes and a

conscience to know the truth, and courage to maintain it. The Christian Church has been built up by the fidelities of true men, and it gains no strength from those who have not courage to be faithful. These will come in thousands when the fashion once is set, but they bring nothing with them. They, certainly, can never be described as the city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all the brave, and His gift is the high heart which sees its course and does not reckon odds. Peden, the Covenanter, speaks for all right Christians when he says, "For my part, I seek no more, if He bids me go." And in one of his sermons the refrain is this: "They sought no more than His commandment; they went, and He carried them well through." With that as "owercome," he runs through the record of his own tempestuous age, when fidelity was so hard to maintain. But whenever Jesus is revealed to the hearts of His disciples the day of shut doors and safe seclusion is past, and the day of plain speech, of frankness and courage and aggression, has come.

In the spiritual record another gift stands first. "He came," says Paul, "and preached peace to them that were far off and to them that were nigh." Peace —for the deepest hurt in the life of a man is not the ill his neighbour threatens; there is a controversy behind that, a war in his own conscience, a sense that his own life is wrong, and that God and he are somehow not at one. And "Christ preached peace." He brought forgiveness to men, the assurance of God's forgetfulness.

To the most faulty He declares the goodwill of God, assuring them of a place in His heart from which all their sin and folly have not banished them. There are powers in God to part you from your sin, so that it can never rise against you any more; and these powers are centred in the Cross of Christ, in which right was done to justice by Him who came to rescue men from what they had deserved.

In every congregation there are hearts as craven as the disciples' were, dull and joyless as if the Lord had not risen. They do not know what peace is or how it could come to them; past, present, future—every chapter of their history and every article of their experience is filled with matter of concern. Fretfulness and disquiet are much a thing of habit, and on some of us the vice has laid its clutch. "Look to the wounds of Christ," proof of His love and victory; do not grope amongst memories of defeat, but settle all your thought on His nature and promise. In that way you can clearly serve Him, giving demonstration day by day that no word of His is vain, and that He verily has the power He claimed of giving peace to troubled men.

KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS.

"And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."—MATT. xxvii. 51.

TOWARDS the end of his Gospel John notes that there were many things which Jesus did which are not written in his book, and that what was written was there with the purpose that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life in His name. That is to say, he wrote not as a historian, but as an evangelist; his business was not merely to recount but to preach, to exhibit, and the same is true of his three companions. When Jesus of Nazareth died upon the cross, Matthew was convinced that something had been done, something which changed the whole situation. He might have said that dryly, so that no one could mistake his meaning; but a preacher works, when he can, with words which speak of things, and the Evangelist prefers such words as have a picture in them. "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom:" the fact in itself is of trifling interest, but he saw in it a symbol or parable of what had taken

place. For it was *a letting in of light*; from that day onwards men have had to do with a God who makes no secret as to His purpose, and who actually wishes to be known. But it was also like *the opening of a door*, an invitation to all the world of men to come with boldness in their need.

Let me speak of these two.

1. In the Cross, if we read the symbol rightly, an end was made of secrecy as regards God. There is nothing in religion more ancient or primitive than the sense of terror in presence of the unknown, which has embodied itself in the typical institutions of temple and priest. The very word *temple* seems to denote something cut off — an isolated bit of the earth's surface, where men, walking freely, come upon an obstacle impalpable, perhaps, but irremovable. The temple did not need to be a building. A mere line might be traced, but no unlicensed creature would dare to overstep it, and towards the shrine, the actual core and centre of the place, men could only stretch out weak hands. Something, they felt, is yonder, something infinitely strong and awful, but mystery hangs close about it. The other institution is the priest— the man who goes where I may not go, who looks on mysteries which I may not see, and who is thus the reminder that for me there is nothing in that quarter but at a distance and at second hand. In his presence I realise that I must take what I am told, for I cannot know for myself.

Nowhere was that suggestion of the secrecy and

remoteness of God more elaborately expressed than in the Jewish Temple. It stood on its hilltop, with court within court. So far the Gentiles might come, and then — advancing by one stage — the Hebrew women, and nearer still, the men of unsullied Jewish birth. At each there was a barrier, and the penalty of passing it without a title was death. Then came the place of priestly ministry, the Holy Place, and finally the Most Holy, where only one man might penetrate, and he on only one day in the long year. And, parallel with that continuous narrowing of the circle of the privileged, there was a lowering of the lights, so that the nearer one approached the centre the fewer might come, and the less could be seen. The great altar stood in the broad light of day, but the Holy Place needed the seven-branched candlestick to light it, whilst the Mercy Seat lay in perpetual darkness, a darkness which was preserved with sedulous care. Such an arrangement was not without its teaching. It said aloud to men, In the midst of your world of actual, apprehensible engagements, here is one place where your eyes are of no help, where all the faculties which have served you break down; and this is where God is, whom no man hath seen or can see. "How dost Thou hide Thyself, O God, Thou only great, that dwellest in high places in silence!" cries Augustine. In many Christian Churches that is still the governing conception. The Roman Church, in particular, is built upon the inviolable mystery of God. All words are vain, all human faculty is baffled; the impossible at

every hour is done, and the wafer of mere bread becomes the very body of the Eternal Son of God, so that reason is flouted and discredited. And since it is impossible for men to know, the Church has arranged a multitude of significant formalities, which keep them in mind of the great reality. That is far away from the understanding which Matthew had of the religion of Jesus. Why, he says, the veil was rent from top to bottom, and light came streaming in, and the heart of God was seen! The peculiar effort of New Testament Christianity is to make men know. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, claimed for this new faith that it was even for servants and handmaids, a revelation intended for the simple. In the Gospels, God is exhibited not as in a shrine, but coming out into the world, and commending His love to men; and John is able to say of that revelation, "We heard it, we saw it with our eyes and gazed upon it—yes, and our hands handled it." Wherever God is there will, of necessity, be much that is beyond our apprehension, but there is no maintaining of a secret. There is absolute frankness, though it is about an immeasurable fact.

The tendency of all religion that is built up about a secret is to degenerate into a kind of solemn play-acting. The priest behaves as if he knew, but really he knows no more than his fellows. Paul had a tenderness for the old ritual, but he confesses that concealment was continued in it not because there was a blinding mystery at the heart, but because the glory had disappeared. "Moses veiled his face that the

people might not see the end of that which was fading away . . . and to this very day the same veil remaineth unlifted" (2 Cor. iii. 13, 14). Curtains of formality and ceremonial were retained, or men would have seen that there was nothing behind. In bare material fact there was nothing. Tacitus records how Pompey, using his right as a conqueror, entered the Temple, and found nothing but a vacant shrine. Think of it—from the foundation there had been reared up twice over this elaborate system of exclusions, wall within wall, and at the heart of all there was an empty room where the High Priest sprinkled blood on a protruding stone! That is where the religion of mystery and ceremonial tends to come. When men are not allowed to assure themselves of the reality of God, they become careless as to whether there is a reality, the ritual becomes of more account than its meaning. And Christ's business in the world was to break down exclusions, and to embolden men, with their own eyes and hearts, to look on God.

"We are not as Moses," says Paul, "who put a veil on his face, . . . we use great plainness of speech;" if the appropriate minister of the old order was the priest, the fit minister of the new is the preacher. The priest says, "Here is a secret far too awful for you to make anything of it; stand at a distance, engaged in your petty ceremonial, whilst I transact the real business on your behalf." The preacher says, "To *you* is the word of salvation sent." "See," he says, "a man like yourselves, a carpenter bearing the marks of his

trade, poor and tired and needy; when He speaks it is as for the common people, in words which are pictorial, simple and winning." And so little of the terror of the unknown appeared in Him that children gathered round, and the crowds pushed in about Him with their clamorous requests. But that, though much, is not the end of the revelation, for it was only when Jesus died that the veil was rent; that was the great disclosure of God's heart, and those who stop short of that will never know God rightly. Ruskin speaks somewhere of Wordsworth—"a measured mind and calm, innocent, unrepentant, helpful to sinless creatures and such of the flock as do not stray . . . but *incurious to see in His hands the print of the nails.*" Ah! Matthew felt that you have not seen God until you have seen the print of the nails. That mystery of sacrifice is what crowns and completes our knowledge.

Light has come in, says Matthew; God, at last, is fully known. The darkness is past, and the true light already shines.

2. And then—as there is the assurance of knowledge, so there is the guarantee of free access. That is a boon which all men when deeply moved have longed for. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His feet!" I have such need of God. My weakness cries aloud for His omnipotence, my ignorance for His wisdom, my penury for His unmeasured fulness. I have such need, and I fain would come, but there is something in me which detains. There is in men an instinctive sense of the

wrath of God, checking the impulse of approach; and often, as in a man paralysed, the heart goes out, but the limbs have no corresponding movement. That difficulty is figured in the veil — the tenuous, impalpable obstacle, which need not block the way of the feeblest, and yet the strongest are excluded. They need God, but, with all their wishing, they dare not come to God. The world speaks of this need in many dialects; I suspect that everywhere, if we looked deep enough, we should come on some corresponding thought. One writer about China says of this, "The Christian declares, I am a sinner; the Buddhist points to his heart, saying, Here there is no peace; but both mean the same thing. Both are anxious to have this miserable consciousness removed, and they are willing to do or suffer anything if only they can attain to mental rest." For in human nature there is a prophetic sense that if we could come at God, for whom we were made, it would be well. And just as at Bethesda, many of us have been waiting for half a lifetime in the hope that their turn may come. But it is terribly long in coming; and they do not realise the truth which Jesus Christ proclaimed that a man may be the friend of God from this very moment.

It is clear that many of the devout in Israel, long before Christ's day, had felt the mockery of the system of sacrifice; for what did it attain? That on one day in the year, and to one man in Israel, the privilege of access was secured. All that prayer and cost and effort — that river of streaming blood — resulted in

nothing more than this, that the door was not quite shut, that God was not utterly inaccessible. And over against that, which was the orthodox faith of Israel, is set this sudden and decisive declaration:—the veil was rent from top to bottom, as if by God's own hand, for this is a work which has its beginning not from earth. By God's own intervention, what all the sacrifices intended but could never secure has been achieved, and now a way is open for all men and all days. An end is made of exclusions, and for ever; and you and I and everybody may go with boldness and obtain mercy. That was a prodigious difference to a Hebrew! To confess one's sins on the head of a lamb or goat, ceremonially to transfer them to that innocent creature —that could be a relief only in proportion to one's lack of moral seriousness, for "it is impossible that the blood of bulls or goats could ever take away sin." Frequently in the Old Testament we come on the cry that sacrifice and offering were not desired, that there *must* be some better and some deeper way. But now since it is sin which holds men back, God has found a way of dealing with it, and at His own cost. On the Cross we see One taking on Himself sins which were not His, bearing their penalty, and as a High Priest confessing that that penalty was due. "Who is he that condemneth," is Paul's challenge, "when it is Christ that died?" Who, think you, will bar the way, when it is God Himself who bids us come? We have boldness to enter into the holiest of all; there is no place so high and terrible that you and I, sinful

men, may not come to it. He is able to present us in the presence of His glory—with exceeding joy. That is the faith of the New Testament.

I suppose the veil was somehow stitched together, for religious people are peculiarly slow to confess that they have been in error. In one shape after another men have renewed against themselves the old exclusion, for it is not ignorance only which keeps men back from God, it is reluctance; and to-day in evangelical Churches the same disaster is repeated. Men know that something great was done by Christ, and that a way of approach was opened, but they do not care to take it. If a man is burdened with his sin, he comes, at that impulse, and receives from his Father the loving sentence of pardon; if he has found life ungentle, he comes to hear words of healing and compassion and fellowship. But to the man who does not care, I wonder what gift even the love of Christ can bring. Perhaps hunger first and sorrow,—perhaps, in His kindness, the coming of human love and responsibility for a home and children, anything that will set the heart He made crying after God. But whenever the heart awakens and a man says, "I will arise and go to my Father," he finds the Father come halfway to meet him. For the witness of Jesus is that with God there is no exclusion or reserve, but a vehement desire to give Himself to the need of His children.

"The veil is rent," says Matthew; "do not fear to tread the way which now is open."

REFLECTIONS.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

"Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I have been known."

LIKE UNTO HIS BRETHREN.

"He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; and again, I will put My trust in Him; and again, Behold I and the children whom God hath given Me."—HEB. ii. 11–13.

OF the Servant of the Lord it is said that He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street, and there are sayings of Scripture which make their appeal with the same deliberate reserve. They do not challenge attention, and as the Master said of some of His own words, unless a man has ears he will not hear. Every Scripture needs to be read in the spirit in which it was written; and when, as here, the writer is recording a discovery which he had made, the reader must bring to it something nobler than a tame acquiescence—he must read with wonder and with gladness.

Custom quickly blunts the feeling, and, through frequent repetition, it may now sound only natural that Jesus should call us brethren. So, to restore the sense of wonder, we should remember that, in His day, it seemed by no means natural for men to call Him brother. He was despised and rejected of men, and

one from whom they hid their faces. He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not. They thrust Him out of their synagogues, refusing Him thus a place in their religious fellowship. They shut men's hearts against Him as a blasphemer, they undermined the attachment of His followers, so that they fell away, and He was left alone. The cry of the mob, "Away with Him! away with Him!" did nothing else than put in words what had long existed in their feeling, for they recognised in Him not a brother, with noble ties of human relation binding them and Him together, but an enemy and a destroyer of all that they held as sacred. His friends, too, were impressed by the sense of His separation from them. "Whence is this to me," said Elisabeth, "that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" "I am not worthy," said the centurion, "that Thou shouldest come under my roof." When children were brought for His blessing the disciples drove them away, fancying that He was above such kindly humanities. And Thomas, called to set his doubts at rest, fell at His feet, saying, "My Lord and my God!" For neither to friend nor foe did it seem natural to count Him merely as one of themselves.

And going deeper, we cannot fail to see how the temptations which assailed the heart of Jesus Himself gathered about this point. Though in the Baptism He had declared Himself as one with men, He could not but be conscious of the enormous differences, and in a storm of feeling He was led out into the wilderness and there was tempted. He had committed Himself to the

task of helping His vagrant, wilful brothers, and every suggestion of the Tempter was addressed to making Him deny or limit His fellowship with them. "Make these stones bread, live by miracle, turn your power to account for your own ease; you are not like other men, why should you suffer like them?" And the Lord made answer, "I have come to be with men as their brother, and like them I will endure hunger, weariness, pain, defeat, if so it be the will of God." "Cast yourself from the pinnacle of the Temple, and let men see in one decisive instant how absolute is your trust and how tender and peculiar is God's care." "As a man with men I wish to live, not asking God to change His way on My behalf; not flying through the air, but walking on the solid earth, unconspicuous and unremarked. That is My chosen part." "Look at the confusion of politics, the strife of unworthy rulers; see how easily a man of mark might recombine the pieces, and win a universal dominion, at the expense of some pardonable compliance with the follies of the men who would bless him for the deceit. All these kingdoms are Thine, if Thou wilt do homage to me." And He answered, "To be a king and sit apart is not My mission, but to do the will of God as a man, and as a man to live My life out to its end, and to win dominion at the last not by policy but by God's assignment; that is My task. Get thee hence, Satan!" The temptation was repelled, but one can see how obstinately it returned, and that it was only by severe self-discipline that He drove His life along the chosen paths of unity and brotherhood

with men. And to complete this array of testimony, it looks as if this assertion of His fellowship with men was never a commonplace to God. At the Baptism and again at the Transfiguration, and with the Greeks and in the Garden, whenever Jesus put from Him the suggestion of a separate path, there came from God afresh some token of approval, as if when Jesus was not ashamed to call men brethren, God was not ashamed to call Him, Son! "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life," is a saying which the Evangelist reports.

The quotations of this great writer are always interesting, and we may be content to follow their guidance. In Jesus he saw the typical saint and son of God, and so he makes no question as to the application to his Lord of all that describes the experience and the trust of saints. The three texts which he adduces mark three stages of experience, which Jesus shared with men, and in which He confessed His brotherhood.

1. He speaks of His mission — the purpose for which He came into this world. "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren." The bare fact that He came into the world at all was a declaration of kinship, for He was God, and might have seemed parted from men by some unbridged chasm. But the Word was made flesh, and with that, the half-forgotten truth that man was made at first in the image of God was reasserted. Between God and man there is not contrast merely, there is substantial and profound resemblance, and the Son of God did not cease to be

divine in becoming man. He was more than man but not less; in Him there was lacking nothing which goes to make a true man. And this Old Testament saying might be taken as a motto for the incarnation: "I will declare Thy name to My brethren," not to a race of strangers and enemies, but to those in whom He divined some ineffaceable relation with Himself.

And the words might be taken as a motto for His teaching. If Jesus and men had not been brethren, He might as well have preached, as Francis did, to birds and fishes, but He knew that God's thoughts could find entrance into human minds, and that there was no word of God by which a man might not live. Jesus always spoke to men as if they were capable of receiving truth, and were even interested in it; and it was to the mere power of truth that He committed the fortunes of His cause. He did work miracles, but these were by the way, and nothing was built upon them. To the Jews He bluntly said, "No sign shall be given you but the sign of Jonah the prophet"—the unsupported word which brings no credentials, but finds its only warrant and confirmation in the heart of the man who hears, for Jesus did not come to speak to strangers but to His brethren.

Many aspects of His teaching become intelligible in this way, but I would remark specially on the tender reverence which it exhibits. All that He found in men was taken by Him on its nobler side. If it had a baser side, at least on that He did not insist. The worship in synagogue and Temple was formal and heartless,

but He held to it, and even made Himself its champion, standing in the Temple courts as the vindicator of the rights of the dumb millions who, from afar, continued to think of this place as the sacred home of a continual revelation. The scribes and lawyers were not entirely venerable figures, and He was stern in reproach, yet their office was screened from all contempt of men. "They sit in Moses' seat," He said; "all that they bid you observe, that observe and do." When the centurion conceived of Him as a captain over powers of the air, He welcomed that faith; when a sick woman came to Him as a magician whose very garments had healing virtue, He accepted that from her; and when a pagan woman of the borders asked for crumbs, not knowing what the crumbs or the full table might mean, He marvelled at her faith. Wherever He went He found people making in doctrine and worship, life attempts after God, and though these were faulty and ill-directed, He dealt seriously with them, and had no hint of blame for those who clung to the familiar forms. "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is pleasant."

The same thought made His ministry hopeful. He felt that He was speaking to men who, through ignorance or passion, had mistaken the ends of life, but who some day would come to themselves and remember the Father's house; and that vague some day may be this day. In the most reckless of creatures He noted the promise of a life which might shame the noblest. "There be last," He said, "who shall be first,"—true

lords in the new kingdom of the renovating grace of God.

2. The second quotation is no less apt, as it speaks of the trial by which the Spirit of Jesus was tested: "I will put My trust in Him."

He took His place as a man submitting to the common helps and disciplines. His life was fed by Scripture, by the offices of worship, and by prayer, to which, especially when any great decision was in prospect, whole nights were given. But the discipline which, in men's experience, most certainly refines and sobers, is that of trust in God, and He shared to the full in it. From the beginning we see in Him what the Apostle calls "godly fear," that reverent refusal to thrust His own will upon God, that submitting of all His plans and words absolutely to the Father. He accepted the divine appointment by which chapters in life obstinately remain dark, so that men may learn to commit the guidance of their steps to Him who sees. Frankly He took His place as one who did not know all things, and who, with the noble company of the devout, must wait for God. In His ministry there was much to test His faith. It had slender and momentary success, but, as His life advanced, the feeling grew of the overwhelming magnitude of the task to which He had been sent. In the last weeks there is visible in the gospel story a constant succession of brighter moods and darker, and sometimes He asked if this gross, custom-ridden earth could by any means be delivered: "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save

Me from this hour?" There He knew the pain of "a failing spirit." In the Garden He cried, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!" And on the Cross, out of the besetting darkness, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He was in all points tempted like as we are, and here He knew the horrors of the dark. When a man sees no step before him, when everything seems hostile, and light has clean gone out of his world, it is not easy to trust, and that was the last stage of His humiliation. As a man He had stooped to be ignorant, and in the end of life He was visited with the sense of desertion. But there, alone and in the dark, without one touch of comfort, He trusted still, saying, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Success had been denied, and no article of pain or ignominy withheld, and then the light went out. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." That is the counsel of Isaiah to all the children of the shadow; and it is a solemn consideration that our dear Lord, who is not ashamed to call us brethren, is least ashamed to claim kindred with him who is most uncomforted. That is a region which He Himself has traversed; and His heart goes out to all who are passing through it, and He ministers such help to them that their days of gloom have often proved fruitful and glorious like His own.

3. The third quotation is great with the sense of victory. The words are taken from Isaiah, who says,

"Behold, I and the children whom God has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of Hosts who dwelleth in Mount Zion." The prophet felt that he and his two boys were a significant group, whose names could not be mentioned without thought of God's message to His people. Maher-shalal-hash-baz—the spoil hastes, the booty speeds, God's judgment is at the door. Shear-Jashub—a remnant shall return; only a remnant, and yet not all is lost. And the reason is suggested in his own name, Isaiah—Jehovah saves. Thus, drawing his sons about him, the prophet faced his nation, an embodied message of warning and of hope. And this writer imagines Jesus also drawing about Him those whom He has begotten by the living word of truth; with them He faces the world and invites its scrutiny, for He is not ashamed of His people.

That is a rebuking imagination, for often we are ourselves ashamed of our fellow-Christians—a narrow-minded and unlovely people, with scanty sense of the magnificence of the truth which they profess, and with little evidence of the reality of that spiritual order in which they claim to live. Who that sees the disproportion between profession and character could refrain from condemnation? Certainly there are many who say "Lord, Lord," whom He has never known, but of some whom we despise, the Master Himself is not ashamed. Their raw and half-baked virtues, the smoky and unradiant flame of their zeal, their unsteadfast affection, these He sees as we do,

and, in spite of them, He claims the children of His heart. We know our own faults, and are often ashamed to call ourselves Christians, but "He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the dying wick." He acknowledges those who are desperate about themselves, and in the Great Day He records fidelities which they themselves had long forgotten. There are saints in every community, in whom touches of Christ's beauty can be seen; but the mystery of His heart is that these are not more the objects of His effort and His favour than some of us whose lives are so uncomely.

The group of Christ and His people, like that of Isaiah and his two boys, is a record in symbol of the magnanimity of Jesus who despairs of no man, and of the wideness of His influence who attracts and dominates men of every kind. In one life is seen how masterful, and in another how tender is the spirit of our Lord. The very contrast which humbles is itself instructive; for what holds together Jesus Christ, the moral supreme, and the ragged company of His followers? How can He touch men so sordid and so impure? I suppose because in every man there is still some part of God, some one thing in which he touches the highest; and God, in His mercy, has "given to us the exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we might be made partakers of the divine nature, and *escape* the corruption that is in the world through lust." The ragged and unlovely following will thus be transformed, and the Church be seen one day a glorious

Church, not having fault or stain. There is a prophetic element in all Christ's judgments of His friends: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" now, for one day "they will be like Him, for they will see Him."

CHRIST'S WEALTH AND POVERTY—AND OURS.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye, through His poverty, might be rich."—2 Cor. viii. 9.

WHOEVER wisely reads the Gospels must get an impression of the astonishing wealth of nature which led the Evangelist John to say of Jesus that of His fulness we have all received. In our unkindly climate, where shelter is the first necessity, and in this world of solid, material respectability, we are apt to lay stress on the wrong points in talking of Christ's poverty. That He was born in a stable and had often to lie down with no roof above Him but the sky, that He had no money and that the supply of His few wants was borne, through the latter years, by others, that His friends were all of the lowly and the outcast—these things must not bulk too largely in our view, as if it were they which constituted His humiliation. In India and the East to this day the figure of the sage or saint is familiar who has nothing but his cloak and his dish, and who yet takes rank in the reverence

of the people with the great men of the land. A Greek sage said that he needed only so much of money as was necessary for a good life; and the contemporaries of Jesus, judging by the same standard, found nothing to surprise them in His material poverty. Some were offended that He, a layman and without education, should thrust Himself amongst the teachers; but even His enemies would never have thought of imputing poverty to Him as a humiliation, for that was almost the mark of the wise.

1. His wealth. A mere fragment of the record has been preserved, a handful of incidents and some scattered sayings and discourses out of these crowded years. The Evangelists make no pretence of telling all. In Luke we read that the charge was made against Him of "stirring up the people and teaching throughout all Judæa," but of that ministry nothing is recorded but the solitary episode of Martha and Mary. In some places a single phrase hints at the activity of weeks: "Jesus," says Matthew (ix. 35), "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." The imagination kindles at so wide a suggestion of comfort,—of tears dried, and pain banished, and hope revived, but the Evangelist has preserved none of the details; only in his word we catch a glimpse of the reason of John's hyperbole, that, if all were written, the world itself would scarcely contain the books. Of Thomas Hill Green it was said

by a friend, "He was not made to drag upon others, but to give support and independence to them," and the image which we get of Jesus of Nazareth is of one who took from no man but had a gift and an inspiration for all.

That is what the miracle stories betoken,—the thousands waiting about Him for their food, the sick folk of a village lying in His path and looking up into His face with half-despairing hope, the lunatics with darkened sense, the fishermen, at the end of all their shifts, with the boat sinking under their feet, the dead, in the dumb appeal of closed eyes and folded hands: "They cried, and the Lord heard, and delivered them out of their distresses." There is always something above nature in the helping grace of God when it comes. Or, where no miracle is recorded, we see the same fulness appearing. The half-pagan men of Galilee, on whom religion had lost hold, ran greedily to hear; they gathered to the water's edge—a crowd of every temper, some eager souls who had knocked at any gate where good was promised; some, sullen and jaded like the woman of Samaria, who had long ceased to hope for comfort for themselves; some in a fever of political discontent, with a scowl for every Roman and a knife for a tax-gatherer's heart; and some dishonoured and defaced, from whom their decent neighbours drew away; and "He sent His word and healed them." His talk went straight to its point, and the message found out the man for whom God meant it, so the common people heard Him gladly. And what

words they were! The pity of most listening crowds is that there is nothing real for them to hear; it is the sound of "one that has a pleasant voice and can play skilfully on an instrument." But His words were drawn from deep wells. He showed no economy or parsimony, but put Himself into every occasion, so that men got from Him not an idea or a phrase but a new life. And the rumour travelled out beyond the borders of the land to places where men's hearts were shadowed with grim questionings, and some men even dared to come from Gentile homes in their sore need of help, with the one demand that they might see Jesus. It is an astonishing revelation of fulness—a land and then a world looking to Him; and the impression of it held men to the end, so that at His latest hour the dying thief cried to Jesus, as to a man who still could aid him, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom."

That was His character in the world, to be the Giver, taught by no man, inspired, upheld by no man, but inspiring and enriching all. "Out of His fulness we all received," said John; and Paul, of these years on earth, was bold to say, "In Him there dwelt in bodily form all the fulness of the Godhead." The unimagined wealth out of which the life of the great universe is sustained was all in Him; "and in Him ye were made full," adds the Apostle, who felt that any fulness in a Christian man must come from that fulness which was first in Jesus Christ.

2. His poverty. That was the earliest impression,

and longer meditation did nothing to reduce it, only, as time went on, men's hearts were touched by thoughts of what lay at the roots of that wealth and gave it character.

Who is it that thus enriches life in me, drying tears, reinforcing conscience, kindling hope, assuring forgiveness? Who is this that brings to me the gift of God and the gift of myself? It is not a man, for no man can have such depth of nature; and if I say it is God, then a new amazement breaks upon my spirit, for He has travelled so far to bring such gifts to me! In Israel there had grown to fulness a thought of God, which was helped by sight of the mountains, which were less sure than His promise, and of the heavens which His fingers had framed; no nation ever had a greater conception. And when the disciples were constrained to acknowledge in this defeated Man nothing less than God, the wonder of it filled their hearts; from that height He had come and to such a depth! In order that He might help us He had taken as His own our human weakness, He had become subject to God's providence, consenting to have His eyes blinded and to walk, as men do, in the dark. He was weary, as they had seen; He was disappointed and grieved in spirit, and hope sometimes burned low. And to that level of humiliation He had come in order that He might be near to hold some cup of water to parched lips. This fact of the humiliation was supreme in all their thoughts of Jesus; and Paul here assumes that whoever, in any sense, was a Christian man at all

knew and thought of it. "You know," he says, "how He became poor."

The Apostles wisely did not vex themselves with metaphysical questions as to how the incarnation was possible, or how it actually took place. They were concerned not with its manner but with its motive, and that they could understand. They said no less than before, Our fulness comes from His fulness; only they now could strike a deeper note, and say, Our fulness comes from His emptiness. Any gift He has for me depends on this, that He became poor. I need a God to heal the trouble of my life, but a God remote, inapprehensible, is no God for the heart. He may have all fulness of strength and wisdom and love, but if these cannot display themselves they might as well have no existence. Wisdom does not sit apart from life, but proves itself to be wisdom by entering into affairs and guiding them to worthy issues. And love, also, is no abstraction; it shows itself in loving, entering into conditions which are foreign to it in order to prove its quality. It takes upon itself burdens which are not its own, it throws aside every privilege and restriction, and plunges into the thick of common life. That which we know in everyday experience lies at the heart of our theology. All that is in God could not be known without an incarnation. The wisdom by which He extricates men, the love by which He redeems men and brings them to His heart—these are as old as God Himself; but they were only guessed at until One took flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.

Our Lord laid down the rule that he who would save his life must lose it, and, in a profound sense, the same is true of God. In order that He should be fully known as God there must be a mystery of humiliation; for He is most clearly seen not in the universe, in which, as Martineau says, He does not so much express Himself as limit Himself "from the movements of free affection,"—not in the universe but in Jesus Christ. The Apostle speaks of the story of Christ's coming and His death as the gospel of the *glory* of God, for love is not in full possession until it can fully display itself; and as He passed from depth to depth, entering one chamber after another of human experience, as He submitted, at length, to death, He was displaying in always greater completeness the glory of the life of God.

It is that which has moved men most. In every land this truth has made its conquests, that there is in God so great a heart of pity, that He entered into men's experience, and took upon Himself their troubles, and finally bore their sins in His own body on the tree. "Ye know the grace." It makes a great difference to religion when Jesus of Nazareth is conceived of merely as a man of loving nature, who served and suffered for his fellows. "Thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep." God was manifest in the flesh; He dwelt among us full of grace and truth; He loved me and gave Himself for me. For my sake, for my sake, He became poor: that is the centre of the catholic faith.

3. Our riches and poverty. Paul looked for it that a Christian man should frankly count himself rich, and he had little patience with that querulous temper which magnifies every touch of privation or disappointment. "We have nothing," he says in one place, "and yet we possess all things."

Most of us still need to acquire this Christian grace of contentment, to magnify the things we have from God, and not to suffer them to be thrown into the shadow of other things which are withheld. Days are lost in lamenting over lost days; we miss a hundred chances whilst we sourly brood over one chance which is denied; questions as to to-morrow come in to perplex and dull our hearts to-day; and thus we refuse a place to trust in God. When a man impotent from his birth was healed by Peter, he followed into the Temple walking and leaping and praising God—with little need, as men might say. His crippled legs had been, at least, a means of livelihood, and now, in middle life and without a trade, he was cast upon the world; what could he find to do? For that he was content to trust God. To-day, after these weary years, he knows the joy of health and movement, and in that he will rejoice, not suffering to-morrow to cast its shadow on to-day. And we, who are so full of grumbling, because life is dull and neighbours are ungracious, because means are scanty and health is not what once it was, we may be rich, says Paul. We have God as our Father, and we may be sure of it; to us there is given the assurance of forgiveness; to us God has come near that

He may be our Friend through life and death. It is only when we forget our Christianity that we begin to grumble.

But then we do forget, and thus, however rich we may be in idea, we are poor in feeling; and Paul here gives us counsel. If you are to enjoy the wealth which Christ has made possible, you must not leave His act alone, but must gather round about it acts of yours. Be generous to these poor Christians in Jerusalem, he says, for you remember how unstinted your Lord was in His giving. He looked not on His own things, and hence it was that all things round about Him seemed to bring Him gifts. The faces of children, and the beauty of flowers, and the blundering ministry of friends were all good cause of gladness to that unselfish heart. He was blessed because He was ever giving; but so long as we seek to mark everything within reach as our own, so long shall we be poor men and unblessed. Joy and wealth begin where His began, and there is no cross so heavy as being without a cross. He looked not on His own things, but all that came was prized as instruments for helping men; and whilst the memory of His example was still fresh, it was said of His followers in Jerusalem that no man counted anything his own, and the result of that attitude appeared in a certain gaiety of mood as "they ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Ruskin somewhere draws attention to the history of the Greek word which describes a man who looks after his own things. In Athens it was taken for granted

that every free man would care for the State; but even in Athens there were some who considered their own business first, and such a man was called *idiotes*—one who cares for his own things. In course of time the word became a more and more distinct expression of disapproval. It meant an outsider, a layman in great affairs, and so, a man unskilled, an awkward, clumsy fellow; and in English the word has taken on a darker tinge, and the idiot is the object of universal compassion. That descent seems to have its lesson, as if the world by degrees had realised that a man who has no concern for larger interests than his own is the unwisest of men, and his life, however prosperous it may be, is the most disastrous and pitiful of human careers, for he gains the world and loses his own life.

Christ's own blessedness and His power of blessing came from His putting others first; and within the Church of Jesus, where all should be most blessed, there will be sullen and discontented lives until men learn from the Master how to live. He was not the first of Christians, as some have said, He made the Christian life possible; and that life which He made possible can only be a life in pattern like His own, rich in gladness and in hope, because it is great in heart and kindness. What other life is possible, indeed, if we "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sakes became poor, that, through His poverty, we might be rich"?

"GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT."

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!"—2 Cor. ix. 15.

"UNSPEAKABLE" is a word much in favour with people whose vocabulary is poor and their observation loose; as they see vaguely and inexactly they readily resort to such resounding words as have no picture in them. But Paul was not one of these. He saw the character of things, and he laboured always to find expression apt and vital for the great realities, so that everyone who has learned to know Jesus Christ is often driven back upon words which Paul has furnished. If he calls the gift unspeakable it is not from looseness or from indolence, but because, when he has travelled on as far as his immense resource can carry him, he finds the fact beyond him yet. And if we would do justice to his word we must not begin with it, for that would mean beginning with mere blur and vagueness; we must begin where we can speak, and advance with him until we reach the verge and limit of silence.

He climbs to this high level as he thinks of man's

gifts to man. His mind is occupied with the distresses of the brethren in Jerusalem, who had to bear the brunt of persecution; and with all his powers of sense, and magnanimity, and devoutness, and playfulness he throws himself into his plea that the Corinthian converts should treat the Mother Church more handsomely. The section is rich in characteristic phrases and ideas. In viii. 1 he speaks of the goodness of God to the Churches in Macedonia in giving them a liberal mind. It may or may not be a blessing to have money, and these Macedonians were poor and persecuted; but it is a real gift of the kindness of God to have a liberal mind. Again, in viii. 5, he marks as the distinction of their gift that they first gave *themselves* to the Lord, so that the gift came after, more, as it seemed, by God's will than by theirs. On a level on which we all can understand him, he urges that giving should be uncompelled, not to save one's credit in the presence of a collector; (ix. 7) "Let everyone give as he has previously resolved, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." And, looking away from them, he thinks of the difference which their gift will make to the hunger-bitten folk in Jerusalem; it will put bread on their table, of course, but, more than that, it will change the whole temperature and tune of their hearts. "For the rendering of a public service like this," he says (ix. 12), "not only relieves the need of your fellow-Christians, but sends their hearts out in abundant thanksgiving to God." Where there had been grinding poverty, which

left no place for any thoughts but anxious ones, there would be singing now. And, in a quaint extension, he bids them consider how these jealously orthodox men in Jerusalem, who had never believed in Paul or his Gentile ministry, would be thawed in their mood, for human kindness is often mollifying even in a man's theology. When they see that you are brothers in act, they will begin to think that, perhaps, the root of the matter is in you after all, and they will wish they could see you to judge for themselves; (ix. 13, 14) "Through the evidence given by the service which you thus render, you will make them thank God that you are true to your profession of faith, and in their prayers they will express their longing to see you, since you have been the vehicles of God's surpassing kindness to them." Thus, as he passes on from point to point, the sense is growing up within him of the manifold possibilities of a gift; how good it is to the receiver! how good to the giver! And when his heart is kindled, he catches sight of another Gift, and there words fail, for it is unspeakable. But he has been led to the threshold of the divine things by a cordial contemplation of what is human and apprehensible.

Will you follow me whilst, after Paul's example, I take the gifts together—the great and the small—and try to understand them thus.

1. The gift unspeakable appeared to Paul as the very pattern and ideal of gifts, and when he looked at what is fine in others he saw broken lights of that which is perfect.

A gift, Paul says, must be uncompelled. If I give because it is the fashion, I am giving to my own reputation, lest I should be thought shabby, or lest people should suspect that I have had business losses; and there is no more grace in the gift than if the money had been actually torn from my hand. If you can think of giving, said Jesus, only to those with whom you are sure of gratitude, you have everything still to learn. There is a pleasure in feeling oneself a patron and benefactor; there is a subtle sense of flattery in being thanked, and our indignation at an ungrateful man suggests that but for the hope of thanks there would have been no gift. But Jesus bids us "love our enemies, and do them good, and lend, never despairing; and your reward, He says, will be great, for ye shall be sons of the Most High, who is kind towards the unthankful and the evil." That is a hard saying; and the very feeling of its hardness should open our eyes to the wonder of His gift, whose kindness falls, like rain and sun, on thankless places, and blesses men throughout a life of seventy years, although, perhaps, they never once have given Him hearty thanks. Jesus came to earth when human life was growing desperate. He saw men as they were; they sought Him for the loaves and fishes, but seldom for Himself; they gaped at any marvel, but were ready the next day to believe the worst about Him. It was an experience to make men cynical, but He did not need to be encouraged in well-doing. He had and they required; and health, knowledge, happiness —

virtue of all sorts—went out of Him, and each new morning He began at yesterday's point, with the resolve of giving all He had. "I lay down My life of Myself," He said; "no man taketh it from Me." *Passus quia Ipse voluit*, as the attentive visitor may read at Melrose, He suffered because it was His will to suffer. And one, who marked Him closely, records how after Judas left the table, and Jesus had thus entered the valley of the shadow, His first word was, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." "Not of constraint but willingly, for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

And holding still to human things, we recognise that a man in giving rightly always gives himself. Those who have money are tempted to make a gift a kind of ransom. In order not to be troubled, and without even acquainting themselves with details, they fling what is of much less worth to them than an hour of time. And above that level there is a merely dutiful way of showing kindness which leaves the receiver sore, for the gift is there but without the heart. "If you give money," said Thoreau, "take care that you spend yourself with it." "The gift without the giver is bare." Now the amazement of God's giving breaks out here, for in everything which reaches us from Him we have Himself. In the sun that warms and the light that glorifies, in every meal and every pleasure and every friendship, there is some token of Himself. He intends the goodness of it, and with all His heart. And in His Church we have a perpetual reminder of that in the call to His table, where we sit to receive of His

kindness, and the gift is nothing but Himself: it is My body, He says, it is My blood. What makes life rich and strong in us is that God so utterly gave and gives Himself. It is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ, the Gift which cannot be exhausted. Even the indifferent may find something to engage him in that life and death—a high example, an abounding hope and comfort, a depth of wisdom; but the heart of the wonder opens up before me when I say, And this is God! This Man who does not shrink from contact with the vilest, who works, and hopes, and will not turn away, who sees the light that has burned so near to blackness, and takes it as His task to make it burn clear again, that is none else than God, and that is the temper that animates the world. No gift of God's is bare, for He gives Himself with all. "He gave Himself for us," and thus all gifts grow costly.

A right gift is always more to the heart than to the need, for the need is soon supplied if the heart is not left hungry. And here, once more, the gift of God is seen as pattern of all; for He does not change the lot of men, or put an end to poverty and suffering, which would only leave our discontent to break out in some other place. He does a greater work than that, for He fills and satisfies the heart, and leaves it there. "If God spared not His Son," says Paul, "shall He not *with Him* freely give us all things?" These brave words were written to a handful of mean Jews and slaves, with marks of need on every face, yet they did not

sound extravagant, for the accent fell in the proper place. *With Him*, they said, we have all things, and that, somehow, made the difference.

> "Remember what the martyr said
> On the rude tablet overhead!
> I was born sickly, poor and mean,
> A slave; no misery could screen
> The holders of the pearl of price
> From Cæsar's sway, therefore twice
> I fought with beasts, and three times saw
> My children suffer by his law.
> At last my own release was earned;
> I was some time in being burned,
> But at the close a hand came through
> The fire above my head, and drew
> My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
> Sergius, a brother, writes for me
> This testimony on the wall;
> For me, I have forgot it all."

If from God we got the measured gift which suits to-day, to-morrow we should be hungering again; but the masterpiece of all His kindness is that trouble has an end in those who trust. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow, dragging out, each with its threat and danger to the end; but He still is the same to-day, to-morrow, and for ever. It is a matchless gift to the heart.

2. Paul holding the gifts together in his mind—the great and the small—sought to make the first not pattern only but inspiration of the others. When he would have them deal more handsomely by the need and trouble of their fellows, he said, "Ye know the graciousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though

He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich."

A selfish man is never rich. His day is as long as his neighbour's, yet he has no leisure except for his own amusements, no sympathy or concern beyond his own perplexities, no strength but to fight his own battles, and no money except for his own need; what haunts his mind at every turn is the dread of having too little for himself. Each man is apt to make his god in his own image, and the god of the selfish man can never be trusted to treat his creatures worthily to the end. Selfishness cuts the roots of a confident faith. But he who has seen Christ's poverty, and who knows through that that God is willing to give without limit, is not afraid about to-morrow, and he bears himself as if he too were rich. He has room in his heart for others than himself, moments in the day for causes not his own, light in his face to gladden those who need him. It is astonishing, along the track of a good life, to note the abundance of its benefactions; there are so many to whom a man of no remarkable endowment has given impulse, by whom he has stopped for kindness' sake, and who have been cheered by his sacrifices of ease and time. You mark these one by one, and you marvel as you consider that they come by the way, out of the already crowded life of an ungifted man. What makes that wealth of his? He is not rich in money, he is not clever, and he has no leisure. It seems as if it were from their hearts that men give and not from their purses, and

the heart of such a man has grown big through thoughts of Jesus Christ.

The deeds we read of in the life of Jesus are points of history, belonging to a year or two in time, but, by some strange mutation, they have all become timeless, and they happen afresh with every day; for Jesus is at work in the lives of men renewing and perpetuating His own service. Time rolls back, and fresh before the attentive soul the eternally blessed works of Jesus Christ are done, seen as if they never had been seen before. He stoops to serve, He turns to lighten a load, He dries men's tears, making nothing of His own, He gives the fulness of His heart and life again. For He lives within His people, who through His poverty have become rich and their hearts are big and gentle; and so long as His gift is cherished, the world will never lack for examples of devotion like His own.

3. But sometimes this gift can only be apprehended through lowlier gifts. "Your gift," says Paul, "not only relieves the need of your fellow-Christians, it sends out their hearts in abundant thanksgiving towards God."

The fact needs no elucidation that many people, through the rigours of their lot, have found the assurance of God's goodwill incredible. The Bible is full of kindly images, which help us on towards trust in God by use of sweetest memories: "As one whom his mother comforteth," we read, "so the Lord will comfort you;" and again, "I taught Ephraim to walk,

holding him by the arms." Jesus Himself taught us, when we pray, to say, "Father!" But what if father and mother are unknown, or the names contain suggestions only of brutality? What avenues of entrance to the heart are closed by that! And when life is sunless, and all its relations are debased, and fortune is unfriendly, how is a man to begin to believe in the love of God? When he has learned to know Him he can walk with God even in the dark, but how shall he know Him first?

These Christians at headquarters had a cruel life, and their temper had grown austere. Of them as of the Church in Ephesus it might be said, "Thou hast borne, and hast had patience, and hast not fainted. . . . Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. . . . Nevertheless, thou hast left thy first love." They were staunch and resolute and orthodox in the old opinions, but the graces which belong to the society of the friends of Jesus had disappeared. It is human nature after all. God's kindness needs to be in flesh, for men to see the meaning of it. Scott, who knew the nature of his countrymen, figures an old Cameronian, who had been on the hills, as softening in his look and even in his theology under the sunshine of a late coming prosperity; and a similar transformation might pass upon many who now are sour and ungenial if only something of the brightness of the Lord Jesus could visit them through ministries of those who will not be repelled.

But far more is this need evident in the shadowed

crowd who wait outside. It is hard for them to believe in God, for nothing in their world points that way. Nothing has the promise of redemption in it or the offer of goodwill. And thus along with every ministry of preaching there is a place for services of human kindness, which soften the mood of men, and change the temperature of their hearts. The gift of God is unspeakable—a thing unmeasured in depth and sweep and majesty, and the very greatness of it baffles the discouraged. It sounds like a word of fairyland apart from the sober realities of life, and thus to it a way is needed amongst the lowly offices of courtesy and constancy. By these we may prepare the way of the Lord and make His path straight.

Only in such ministries let our aim be clear. It is much to give to lonely men the sense that they have found a friend. But men are made for God; and in our faulty human kindnesses we must aim at bringing them to know the love of God, for that is the crown of charity. The small gift may prepare the way for the great; and what higher service could there be than, through patient sacrifice, to make the love of the Father credible to His children?

CHRIST'S EXPERIENCE AND CHRIST'S CONSTRAINT.

"This is He who came through water and blood, not with the water only but with the water and with the blood."—1 JOHN v. 6.

"THIS is He who came through water and blood, not with the water only but with the water and the blood." John, as you see, alters his preposition, and thus he gives us warning that the two clauses have not quite the same reference. The first speaks of the experience through which Jesus passed and by which He was made; whilst the second tells of the gifts which He procured, the powers with which He is now invested, and by which He is transforming the lives of men.

In the 118th Psalm we read the joyful cry, "Blessed in the name of the Lord is He that cometh." Sometimes dimly and sometimes more distinctly, that figure of the Coming One had inhabited the dreams and the prayers of Israel. It stood for all that life had taught them their need of, and all that God, who is rich in mercy beyond our imagination, had prepared for them.

Wherever oppression pinched them, or ignorance perplexed, or sin degraded, there, it seemed, the promise sounded out of the Coming One, whose mission was to bring in the reign of God. And now He has *come*, says the Apostle, not referring merely to His birth, for the manner of His arrival in the world interested John so little that he does not even mention it in his Gospel. This coming has a deeper sense than that.

There is such a thing for a man as coming to himself, making himself count for what he is. A lad may have some genuine gift, and, in the faith of that, he may be raised to an important position, but at first his capacity is taken, to a large extent, on trust. The work and the surroundings are new. Whatever his powers are, they are not fully available, and he does nothing which a greatly inferior man might not have done as well. But by degrees he collects and concentrates himself; gifts and faculties which were in promise are now discovered, and the man is able to make every portion of his nature tell in his work. And then you may say, He has arrived. A great many clever people never do arrive; they live in fragments, and only words or hints in widely sundered fields of activity suggest what they might have been. Sometimes it is their fault, due to the want of a uniting purpose, sometimes it is due to unfriendly circumstances, but the real man, as it seems, is never born. He lives and dies an unfulfilled prophecy, and reverently we wonder if, in

the life beyond, his chance may come at last, and the man attain to the stature that is really his. Now it is in some such pregnant sense that John could say of Jesus that He came by means of the water and the blood. The experiences through which He passed revealed what He was, and made Him tell in the world for all that He was. And when He had gone through them, it could be said by those who had been crying out for the Christ of God to come, He has come now; the Christ of the world's long expectation, the Christ for the world's bitter need is here!

1. Consider these determining experiences which made and marked Him out as the Christ for all the world.

(*a*) Of the Baptism. Only a man who looked deep into his Master's heart would have thought of setting the Baptism in such a place, for on the surface it does look like a kindly incongruity in the life of Jesus. The suggestion of the ordinance is of burying the old self out of sight, of washing the stains of evil clean away, and of engaging oneself, in a new degree of intimacy, to the service of God. Now Jesus never made confession or asked forgiveness, and He had no bad past to escape from; thus the sacrament may seem at first sight out of place. But only at first sight. The temptation which waits for every superior nature is to assert his unlikeness to those about him. The scholar looks across with perplexity at those who never read a book, and he wonders what life means to such people. The man of well-balanced nature looks

with a certain irritation at his kinsman, who has allowed his appetites to impoverish and degrade him; he cannot understand that kind of thing. The enthusiastic woman, whose day is too short for all the pieties she seeks to crowd into it, feels that many of her fellow-members in the Church are not Christians at all. They are respectable, no doubt, in life, but their temperature is that of Laodicea. And in many who are not superior there is still a trace of the leaven of the Pharisee, and they give thanks that they are not as other men are.

Now between Jesus and His fellows there was a difference not at all imaginary. Hermits and ascetics in all ages have fled from the contamination of this evil world. Separatists of all schools withdraw themselves from what they count the worldliness of the Church, in which they show their unlikeness to Jesus Christ. For He, knowing the difference which parted Him from men, sought to make nothing of it. The synagogue worship and teaching were often heartless, but He held to them. The day of ritual offerings was running to its close, and the Temple itself was near its fall; but He observed the feasts and worshipped where the fathers had come, seeking in all things to assert His oneness with His brethren. That is the point about which the temptations turn. Demonstrate your singularity in the world: since others have to live by bread, live you by miracle. In presence of the gathered crowd make display of what your faith can do, that laws which hold for other men are without authority

over you. But He would not have it so. He would live by bread or be hungry as His brethren must; He would not fly through air upborne by angels, but would walk on dusty roads, with weary feet and heart, for it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren.

John, as he looked over the story of his Lord, recognised a point of crisis in the Baptism. Here Jesus stood at parting ways: was He to exhort men from His own pitch of elevation to come up to where He was? or was He to descend into the labouring, suffering crowd and do His work as a man with men? Something was decided which never could be recalled when He went down into the river. Whatever the ministry might contain, there would never be Pharisaism in it. Men coming to Jesus need never fear to be repelled, for this is One who understands the general heart of man. He came, says John,—He came to be the Christ whom men need through the water.

(*b*) The next is even a stranger word, for He came through blood. He was made wholly Himself by dying. Now of most men it is true that death is the end of their influence. Whatever work they have planned remains undone or passes into other hands; the influence they have acquired is dissipated, and in the Church, in politics, in literature, we sorrowfully recognise blank places which might have been so nobly occupied. What a different course events must have followed if this man or that had only been spared!

> "Thou shouldst be living at this hour,
> England hath need of thee!"

cries Wordsworth to Milton; but that is rhetoric, for death confines the activity of all men under the sun. Yet John, who knew what life and death are, says of this man, Jesus of Nazareth, that He came to His point only by dying. That discovered what He was: it showed how He would go all lengths to aid a man, and, more than that, it gathered up and concentrated His influence, so that, since that day, men have had to do not with the outspread example of a fair life but with one subduing fact, which interprets all the rest—"He loved me and He gave Himself for me." The death of Christ embodies the whole purpose and significance of His life: all He sought for men, all the influence He desired to gain, all the authority which He ever claimed is here confirmed to Him in the one article. He came to tell us of God, to help us to bear our burdens, to console, to heal, to cheer; He fought our common enemies and subdued them; these all are true. But then, crowning them and pressing them upon us with a wholly new urgency of personal appeal to gratitude and wonder and obedience, it is said, He died for us. It is not in any rhetorical figure, but in very sober truth that John says, He had *come* only when He had died. For short of that, the amazement of the love of God had not been given into our possession. The Christ came through water and through blood; blessed be His great name!

2. So much of His experience, but now of the powers

which He wields in virtue of that experience. He came with the water and blood.

(*a*) Of the water. A man of genius has been described as one who can kindle his own fire, for, even in a chill and lightless period, such a spirit burns like a torch. That contains a measure of truth, but it is impressive throughout history to notice how seldom men of genius are born alone. A nation travels on into some favouring zone of climate, and, in a little, a whole flight of poets or artists or philosophers appears; and great religious teachers, also, have fit seasons for their arrival, and they appear in company. In the very substance of our faith there is an element which, to worldly men, seems extravagant, and no teacher can be held adequate whose own experience is wholly pedestrian and commonplace. Now, with reverence, we must remember that Jesus began His work in a revival. Long fed by study and prayer and the practice of daily duty, His pure soul was stirred by the spectacle of the crowds moving to claim their part in a better Israel. No teaching is complete which does not keep a place for these tumultuary forces which suddenly transform the lives of masses of men. In days like these, eternity comes up before men and looks near; the clamorous details of life, the orderly succession of duties fall to their place, and the great things—God, eternity, forgiveness—are revealed without disguise. Now that is where Jesus began. He used John's watchwords; He came to Galilee, as Mark tells us, preaching the gospel of God and saying, "The time

is fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel." There was more in His ministry than that, but that was never absent. The Christ of the New Testament is something more than good and kind, for John, in his vision, says that "out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword," and "His eyes were as a flame of fire." No honest reader of the Gospels can fail to note that element of rigour, for while He showed to men the kindness of the Father, He showed them also the terror of life and sin. *Strive,* He says, as of a work not without effort, "strive to enter in." When men shuddered at a fatal accident in Jerusalem, He said, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." In His picture of the virgins, with its glimpse of a festival of light and joy, He hints also at the shadow and the tears outside. He not only let men know that a new life was possible, He made them feel that hard at their back pressed on the inexorable retributions of God. And if many have been won by the beauty of holiness and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, many have been driven also by fear of themselves. When they have seen their life, as God sees it, in its confounding and shameful inadequacy, they have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel. John was a disciple of the Baptist before he came to Jesus, and he was not likely to disparage his old master. In himself he had known the power of the ministry of the water, and he saw how Jesus too commanded the hearts of men by that preaching of repentance. "He came with the water."

(*b*) But John knew, in his own experience, that what commanded his devotion was an instrument more effectual and more personal than that. A preacher of repentance needs no argument beyond the facts of the case. He shows what is right. With more or less of skill he appeals to the master emotions of fear and hope and admiration; he tells, and conscience makes his message credible, of what evil in its issue is. But all this is so detached from himself, it lies so plainly in the bare facts of the case, that a bad man has yet proved to be a successful revival preacher.

Now John felt that the power of Jesus Christ was bound up closely with Himself. He never gave men something that was His, He gave Himself; this is My body, He said, and it is for you. In every conversation He gave assurance of a whole man devoted to the guidance or consolation of his friend, and the disciples felt that the constraint by which He held them was rooted in this. "He is *Himself* the propitiation for our sins," said John, not something that He did but that which He was. Montaigne, speaking of his dearest friend, who died too early, wonders how they held each other as they did, and the reason which he gives is this, "Because it was you, because it was I," and John would have said the same. The secret of his new life, of his bigger and more generous heart and his wider outlook was just this, that one day he had met with Jesus of Nazareth, and his eyes were opened to see Him as Lord. And as the water was to John the symbol of the whole preaching of repentance, so the blood was the symbol

of all that was in Christ's heart, His steadfast will to help men, to bear with them, to suffer, to die for them. Even before Calvary He laid those whom He met under a sense of infinite indebtedness. They owed to Him the gift of Himself, because He had put all He had and all He was at their disposal, and they also owed to Him the gift of themselves, for He had made them new creatures, which, already in His lifetime, was a prophecy of the Cross. "The blood is the life," said Moses, and John, too, acknowledged in "the blood of Jesus Christ" all that was constraining and irresistible, all His gracious effort, all His obedience and endurance, all His agony and tears and passion. He came not with the water only, with powers which could be separated from Himself and wielded by any other, but with constraints which were His own. "He came with the blood."

Friends, we must all seek to know Jesus thus. It is a poor thing to stop at the knowledge of Jesus as a preacher of righteousness calling to repentance, for that gift we might have from moralists lying outside of the Christian pale. To see ourselves is much, but to see Him associating Himself with us, and then, in one great act of faith, to associate ourselves with Him, making His confession ours, His righteousness ours, that is what transforms. A man has no standing in God's presence by himself, it is only as he is involved in the life of the Righteous One that he is secure. Our justification stands in that loving association, in which He suffers for what I did as if He had done it, and

in which I, who can do nothing aright, rejoice in what He did as if I had done it. When a man knows Jesus thus, it marks a new beginning. He may break away from the power of the water, recalling his own repentance and returning to where he was, but the blood—that awakens the heart of a man, it cleanses from all sin. "If One died for all," says the Apostle, "then all died; and He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." It is a new beginning, and life henceforth is stayed amid eternal things.

THE SECRET OF A GODLY LIFE.

"And without contradiction, great is the mystery of godliness, even He who was manifested in flesh—justified in spirit, who was seen of angels — preached among the nations, who was believed on in the world whilst received up in glory."—1 Tim. iii. 16.

KING LEAR, in his agony, says of his cruel daughter, "Let them anatomize Regan and see what breeds about her heart: Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" For there is a mystery in evil, an element of the unexplained; and men who are not ignorant of their own hearts are baffled sometimes in guessing at a motive which might account for the crimes which startle them. "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" And at the other extreme of character, Paul says there is a mystery of piety, though I fear we are less curious as to it. We often acknowledge goodness, as if it were nothing past the common, and we do not consider that to account for that life full of comfort and of quietness, rich in love and good works, patient and cheerful and kind, there must be some noble secret. But Paul corrects the error, and with a kind of awe

exclaims, "Without contradiction the mystery of piety is great." Just as a scholar pores over a half obliterated inscription, in which the key to a forgotten civilisation may be found, so does the Apostle with greedy interest look into this master secret of the life of man; and, after study, he declares that the hidden power which accounts for all true piety is "He who was manifest in the flesh."

Centuries later, a scribe, by adding a line in the heart of a letter, changed "who" into "God," and thus obscured the sense. That change does not appear until three hundred years after Paul was dead, when men were more concerned with theology than with piety. Paul had written, "the mystery of piety is great," and men twisted it into "the mystery of the Christian creed is great," which is a truth but a truth of greatly less importance; for it is easy to occupy oneself with the mysteries of the faith and to give no heed to the secret and the source of personal character. Let us be careful to follow not the scribe's lead in the matter but the Apostle's. A good man is never to be passed slightingly as one amongst the millions of the insignificant. Whatever his station, he is the true Shechinah, the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon him. The charm which we discover in him is not his merely, but is a light from far-off fountains, for as Paul witnessed of himself, "It is not I that live, but Christ that lives in me."

That is the general sense; but the structure of the

verse is so singular as to call for closer study. It hangs loosely attached to what precedes so that readers have suspected a quotation; and the common opinion is that here we have three couplets from a hymn, in which the power of Jesus Christ in the life of men is exhibited in successive contrasts.

1. The Son of God, who is the secret of piety, is Himself One who, though manifested in flesh, was justified in spirit—that is, in His own spirit. He could review His life and say, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" And, at the end, He cried, "It is finished," for He saw no task undone.

That is, confessedly, a unique fact, for flesh and spirit in man have not kept pace. Our most valiant deeds exist in our imagination. The words which would achieve their purpose of consolation do not get spoken, and all our wittiest and most effective retorts come to us when the time is past. In every man there are dreams and determinations which are lofty, but in the process of translation into fact their wings are clipped. They may be no meaner than our neighbours', and they may even win some tribute of applause; but when we compare them in our hearts with the thing which we intended, we are ashamed to see how crippled and ineffectual they are. This is not what I meant. I heard a call which ranked me with the sons of God; and this thing, whatever judgment men may have of it, is failure undisguised to me. Looking into it, I see where selfishness intervened or courage faltered; I note how fervour was

damped and resolution wavered. You count it nobly done, and my flattered humour likes to think you right, but my heart knows better; for the mark of my own disloyalty is clear upon it. The law of my members has warred against the law of my mind.

The more nobly a man conceives of the uses of life the farther is he from self-approval. The savage who has brought down a deer, and lies at night beside his fire with appetite extinguished, has little more to ask for, because his inner life has scarcely begun. There are men amongst ourselves whose mind is like a shut-up house; they never go into themselves, but live out of doors, and are content if their companions are pleased. But when a man is alive, and the world is great about him, and the sense of God is deep, he gets such views of what life was meant to be that all he attains looks paltry. He sees how every common task might grow to be a true divine service, how speech might be a means of grace and cheer; but when thought is turned to fact the glamour all has gone. And thus it is that, judging by any worthy standard, no man was ever able to justify himself in spirit; for that would mean that he had answered in every particular to God's thought of him, that, without diminution, he had conveyed the very influence he was meant to convey, that no sloth of his nature, no negligence, no shadow of inconsistency or pretence had hindered the just effect of his life.

So we are bound to pause with reverent amazement before the great fact which the first couplet expresses.

God's eternal word—His inmost thought and meaning—was manifest in a human life; God's heart looked out through human eyes; God's wisdom spoke with human lips; God's untiring purpose of saving men was expressed in the life of One who Himself was weary as we are, and whose limbs flagged often. And in the depth of His spirit, where He realised the reason of His being in the world and all that hung upon Him, He was *justified*. He had no superficial standards, yet with the fullest apprehension of all He had to do, He declared that He had done it; in clear sight of all the Christ must be, He professed that He was the Christ of God. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," was one of His sayings, as if no ray of the divine brightness were kept back. The flesh which, in other men, has lagged behind the swift sights and desires of the spirit, was in Him a fitting ally.

Paul says that the secret of piety, wherever that piety is found, is Jesus Christ; and it is fitting that the first couplet should present Him in His character as the ideally good man, in whom the old antagonisms of flesh and spirit have disappeared. He undertook the common tasks; His business in the world was, first of all, to do the will of the Father. And if, at any time, we feel this common task impossible, and that for a man, with a man's body and appetites and weaknesses, to be holy is a dream, we need to recall the experience of the Man Christ Jesus. "He suffered being tempted, and He is able to succour those who are tempted."

His victory is the promise of all victories; by His resistance He broke the sweep of the universal custom which had borne men on in evil ways, despairing of the good, and He created a new tradition. By His sacrifice He broke the pride of men who love because He loved first. And thus by example, by influence, and by conquest He commands the hearts of men, who find in His obedience another world of possibility opening before them.

2. He was seen of angels—He was preached among the Gentiles. There are two revelations—to high and low, for, as Chrysostom nobly says, "The angels along with us saw the Son of God, not having seen Him before." Angels and men learned by the same events. The stainless sons of light, the high intelligences, the swift ministers of the will of God, had some new message borne in upon them by the incarnation. That is a high region in which we cannot walk securely, but Peter helps our thought when he speaks of the angels as stooping down to gaze at the mystery of the suffering of Jesus Christ. Those who never sinned and who know not of the strife of wills must stand outside, only guessing at the fitness which we acknowledge in Him who gave His life for us. If we think in the forms of the New Testament, we may boldly say that the angels could not know the glory of being humbled, or the new power that would be gained by laying power aside. When the Son of God emptied Himself and became a servant, what a mystery there was! and when He returned as a Captain of

salvation, bringing with Him the first of a new world of ransomed men, how that mystery was justified! And thus He was revealed to the angels.

At the other pole of spiritual being were the Gentiles, sons of God, indeed, but prodigal sons who had squandered their inheritance, and on whom, in Christ's day, a mighty famine had come. It was a hard age. The masters of the world were the least religious of all the nations which have held high place, and yet, even in Rome, there was a pathetic craving for anything which gave promise of deliverance. Paul, in his letters, hints at the moral conditions of those amongst whom he laboured, and John sums up all that he found in the world in a trinity of evil—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the vainglory of life. It was to such a world that the vision of the heart of Jesus was vouchsafed.

In what way could the width of Christ's influence be expressed more arrestingly than in this couplet—a revelation to the angels, highest and purest of God's creatures, and a revelation in the same facts to the Gentiles, who were without God and without hope in the world? Throughout the ages He has remained central in all the contrasts and combinations of men. There is no possibility of growing past Him. At most we may grow up towards the point at which we begin to comprehend Him, and those who, standing highest, have least need, as it seems, of Christ the Saviour, would be the last to maintain that their need is little; whilst in others who have lived their life apart from

Him, owning no lack, there are movements of return to Him who is in all and through all and over all. For Richard Jefferies, the clean-souled Englishman, who, beyond all men of his time, knew the enchantment of the outer world and wrote it at large in his books, there came a day when another enchantment possessed him; and in pain of body he was content to turn back and forwards over the one story, in which a new sunlight is discovered. No virtue or knowledge lifts a man past the power of the Book, just as no abasement sinks him below it. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, or, if you will, there are both Jew and Greek; angel and pagan, scholar and adventurer, the religious man and the frivolous and the profligate, are brought together for the same lesson, and they bow at His feet who rules as Lord from the Cross. Zinzendorf said that, to his fellow-Moravians, the greatest thing in Christ was that He had become small. That broke the pride of the pagan world, and it drew the angels down to gaze, and other brightnesses of God might well be hidden for a time that this radiance might shine out.

To that love all men must be in debt. The world has nowhere in it a self-contained and self-sufficing virtue, and for high and low Paul's prayer is ever the same, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be your portion." For he had learned that no life is so rich or so secure as that which owes everything to sources beyond itself. After the experience of nineteen centuries we can with even better confidence declare

that the power of Christian character—what makes it clean and strong and kind — is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "We love," says John, "not Him only but all men, because He loved first."

3. Believed on in the world — received up in glory; Christ's influence persists though He Himself has passed from sight. Faith was raised to a new pitch of victorious confidence by what seemed likely to dash it to the ground, and that is not unreason, because there was not merely death for Jesus, there was exaltation at the right hand of God.

When Jesus died, the priests did not think of prosecuting their quarrel against the disciples, for they reckoned that, with the death of its author, the movement would quickly die away. He might be remembered and mourned for a little, but time heals many wounds. Once He is laid in a dishonoured grave, as a blasphemer and a rebel, His power is at an end. That was the judgment of shrewd men, who fancied they had understanding of the forces which rule society, but history has recorded the unbroken advance of Christ's influence. His name is borne by millions, but that is little; what is really great is that, with every age, the will of Christ has been better understood, and thus He passes to the throne. "He is believed on in the world, though He is received up in glory."

The fitness of this couplet in its place requires no demonstration. Christ can be understood as the secret power which accounts for piety only when we

remember the constraint of the spiritual things. If our world is wholly a world of sense, with nothing of the unseen at work within it, then our virtue will be altogether prudential and diplomatic; we shall be honest because that is the best policy, and, yielding to material threats, we shall bear or attempt nothing for an idea. A man living at that level may be a respectable citizen, but he knows nothing of the piety which is animated and controlled by the powers of the unseen. It is not a paradox to say that Jesus came to His power only when He passed from sight. He had Himself anticipated such an exaltation, and said, "When I am lifted out from the earth, I shall draw all men unto Me." The secret of piety is that Jesus Christ, withdrawn, unseen, is Lord and Lawmaker in all things, that every step may be taken in His strength, every moment regulated by His will, for to a believing man the unseen Christ has more reality and authority than any object which the sense reports. Living by faith in the Son of God, he goes about his work with his heart in company with Christ the Victor. Robert Louis Stevenson says of his father that he was "a distinctly religious man but not a pious," in which he strikes at a common weakness. His father, he felt, had too keen a sense of the tragedy of things, and lacked the alert composure of the truly pious man, in whose heart, above the confusion and dismay, the majesty of God, as the Disposer of all things, and the glory of the exalted Christ are ever clear. The pious man is unfailingly cheerful and

brave, for his heart dwells above the tormented regions where lightnings blaze and rain-storms gather. Sin is vanquished, and Jesus sits expecting until His enemies be made His footstool. That faith is the secret of piety.

Never pass a good man by, he has more to teach than any book. Do not laugh at eccentricities of opinion in him, for they may have a deeper root than his wise neighbour's soberness; at least, in this hard business of being good he is our master. And do not, in his presence, forget the Lord whose beauty is upon His servant, making his temper sweet, making his courage firm. For great is the mystery of the godly life; it is nothing else than Jesus Christ Himself who, when manifest in the flesh, was yet justified in His own spirit, who was revealed to angel and to pagan at once, and who, though gone from sight, is believed on and obeyed by men.

CHRIST IS FOR EVERYBODY.

"God was pleased to make known how rich and glorious is this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory."—Col. i. 27.

PAUL, in his letters, often speaks of the mystery of God, of Christ, of the gospel, and what fills his mind, in using such phrases, is that God is all the world's God, equally near and equally blessed for every man. That was what set him at variance with his nation. They had no quarrel with many of his opinions, but when he threatened their pride of separation they struck at his life. He might talk as he would of God, of sin, of forgiveness, but when they heard that he was bringing a heathen man into the Temple, and when they saw that, on his theories, there was no need of a Temple at all, the worshippers in Jerusalem were transformed into a murderous mob from whose clutch he had to be rescued by Roman troops. Wise men do not run the risk of martyrdom in mere stubbornness, and when Paul speaks of "the mystery of Christ—for which I am in bonds," he does not vaguely mean the gospel, he means the freeness

of the gospel. That is what had lain hidden in the mind of God, and it was for that he was "an ambassador in chains." In Ephesians iii. 4 *seq.* he is quite explicit. "Ye can perceive," he says, "my understanding in the mystery of Christ, to wit that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise." That, in Paul's view, was God's secret plan, hid from the ages and the generations, and now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets, and our text says that God willed it that this mystery should be made known among the Gentiles not as bare fact, but as a very radiant and marvellous thing, a thing to sing about, a cause for which a man might very gladly live and die.

It is strange in looking back to see how nearly this secret of gladness was anticipated ages before. In three Psalms—the 96th, 97th, and 98th—you will find a sudden burst of song, just as when the dawn comes and the birds awaken, and the cause of it is Paul's discovery that God is all the world's God. "Sing to the Lord a new song. . . . He has made known His salvation. He hath openly declared His righteousness in the sight of the nations. Let the sea roar," says the poet, "and the pride of its waves, the world and its people; let the tossing waves clap their hands, let the hills sing for joy before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and all the peoples with equity." It seemed as if at that time the full day of knowledge

was at hand, but the time of promise passed, for "God enlargeth a nation, and straiteneth it again." Hearts which had expanded to take in the world, grew narrow and parochial, and darkness descended on the face of the earth. But now the day had come, and Paul felt his time too short for all he had to do in letting men know that the great and merciful God was actually for them. It irked his humour to think that men anywhere should be living who did not know what life contained for them. John Wesley, hearing of the Isles of Scilly across the narrow seas, notes in his Journal: "I had had for some time a great desire to go and publish the love of God our Saviour, if it were but for one day, in the Scilly Isles," and the same temper burned in Paul's heart. "I make it my aim," he says (Rom. xv. 20), "to preach the gospel, not where Christ is already named, but as it is written, They shall see to whom no tidings of Him came, and they who have not heard shall understand." "I have a longing," he writes to Rome, "to come to you whenever I go to Spain." The whole man was missionary. A sea tempted him to cross it; a range of hills spoke of men lying out of sight upon the farther slope; and wherever he came, he had the one errand to make known this mystery of God. Let me speak of it, for a little, after his example. For it means—

1. That Christ is for everybody. That is the mystery of God. Until Jesus came, men were broken up by class and race and education, and stress was everywhere laid upon their differences. Hints had been

given, especially by the Stoics, of a better order, and the way had been prepared, but it is not an exaggeration to say that Jesus Christ discovered humanity. "I date the beginning of the science of language from Pentecost," says Max Müller. Before that day, Greeks and Romans reckoned every other nation barbarous, as the Chinese do to-day. The Jews spoke of the rest of the world as "the nations"—an indiscriminate huddle of folk, for whom they did not care enough to try to distinguish one from another. But now there was a real uniting bond. Men everywhere, it appeared, were moved by the same hopes and fears and longings, and at that the partition walls began to crumble. Now that the mystery is declared, we may wonder how it should ever have seemed a mystery at all. The one sky stretches over all men; the sun shines, and the earth is glad for all, and love and hope and the faces of children speak to all. But men were slow to believe that God really meant it. Christ is risen, say the orthodox in Russia on Easter Day, He really is risen. Ay, say the older sect, *our* Christ is risen, but yours is not. And with the same inveterate grudge of nature men refused to read the lesson of the Father's heart. Children know in their games that the best hiding-place is not always the most out of the way; lay what you wish to conceal, openly where anyone can see it, and many will gape and stare, looking in every quarter but the true one.

Since Paul's day, the centre of interest has changed. The exclusive national pretensions of the Jews have long since been laughed away and forgotten, and each

new decade in missionary history has furnished fresh proof that Jesus has a welcome waiting for Him in every land. No contrast in experience or civilisation is sufficient to remove any people from the range of His influence; for Greeks and for barbarians, for wise and for unwise, He has His gift prepared. General Booth, in the earlier days of the Army, confessed that he was forced to make a choice; no man's arms are long enough, he said, to reach out to give a hand to the rich and to the people of the depths. That was candidly spoken, but our Lord is not thus confined to a class. "He is rich in mercy to all them that believe."

This universality of Jesus is not easily received, especially by respectable people. The modern Pharisee has no inclination to say, God is for me not for my neighbour; he says rather, My poor neighbour needs God and the gospel, in a way that I do not need them. No man appears to himself as a member of a class or group, but stands apart; and very easily there grows upon the mind a certain cloudy sense of singularity, which makes men reject remedies and consolations which suit their fellows. I never had a taste that way, one says, it is against my disposition and my inclination; and thus he settles into habits of self-exile, holding himself aloof from the prayer and struggle and gladness of his brethren. And yet it is by these things that men live, and those who refuse to look along that simple way of evangelical experience may be refusing life itself, and existence for them grows chill and naked, or it grows vain and futile.

There is a sense in which our Christian education is against us here, for the level of conduct has been raised, and many people, without an effort, live a life of order and sobriety. They have no sense of sin, no gaping needs, no inward impulse driving them to prayer. They do not mean to be irreligious, and yet, in what is the living heart and centre of religion, they have no share. The proclamation of hope and pardon to a man of broken life they can understand, but for themselves it seems irrelevant.

And yet, says Paul, Jesus Christ is for everybody. That is the mystery of God, hid from ages and generations, but now made known. Jesus is the great discoverer of the unity of the human kind. People are infinitely diverse on the surface, but at the naked heart of things they come very near to one another. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. A man who has listened with a kind of frigid superiority to the small domestic talk, amongst his friends, of wife and child, discovers one day that he too is human, and is content to share the elementary experiences of a man's life. It is not otherwise in religion. Health begins for a man when he comes down from his pedestal of superiority, and is content henceforth to be in God's debt for everything. When men are deeply moved they are marvellously like one another, haunted by the sense of ill-desert, humbled by the divine majesty, and gladdened by the wonder of God's kindness.

I do not know that there is any lesson so essential in our Churches to-day as this. Paul had to say to the

Jews, God has a gift for these Gentiles as well as for you; but now he would say to men and women entrenched in the Pharisaism of culture, of comfort, of sobriety, God has a gift for you as well as for the outcast. Jesus Christ is for everybody, and your life is growing emptier than it should be for lack of Him. It has not power in it, or hope, or meaning, because this mystery of God is hid from you. Bunyan tells how Mr. Honest, in the prospect of dying, had spoken to one Good Conscience to meet him at the river and help him over, which he did. But the last words of Mr. Honest were, "Grace reigns," and with that he left the world. There is much of admonition in that story. Here is a man who, when he comes to die, can call upon his conscience to declare, as Paul did, that he had lived without reproach, but his last word is not of merit but of grace. He had received more than he deserved. Men remain content with themselves and their own performance only so long as they are living apart from God; but when they come in sight of Him, and see what holiness means, the awe and majesty of it, their tone is altered. They no longer want themselves, their own narrowness and vanity, their little life and aims; they want what He can give, the bigger heart, the fuller life, the right of sonship. And Jesus came with these, making no exception or condition. My salvation is near, says God, it shall not be far off. Christ is for everybody.

2. And Christ is something great for everybody. In you Gentiles, says Paul, who have been cut off by

nature from privilege and from hope, in you Gentiles, also, Christ is the hope of the glory. Israel looked forward to a state of things which would abundantly make good the slights and wrongs of history. Their land had been overrun by conquerors from North and South, and they themselves had been led away in chains. They were too small even for contempt amongst the nations. Ah! but history has its compensations; and there is a kingdom coming in which the honour will be ours and the shame and the contempt shall be for our oppressors. They can have no portion in the hope that keeps our hearts alive; that is for us alone. But Paul says to the Gentiles, It is not so, Christ in you is the pledge of the glory. He who has received Jesus Christ as his Master to-day has no door shut against him in all the worlds to come. Whatever heights the future may conceal, they cannot be too high for him, for Christ is something great for everybody.

Take the promise in its wideness of all that the future contains. Take it of *character*. You count yourself a Christian man, and yet the experience you have had inclines you to treat your standing very humbly. You are not the stuff that saints are made of; you have little gust or relish in devotion, little stayedness in self-control, little loftiness and emancipation in the range of your feeling. You think you are a Christian man, but you are sure that you will never bring great honour to your Lord. But Christ, says Paul, where He comes at all, brings with Him gifts that are worthy of Himself. The heart which receives Him has,

in the act of receiving, opened itself up to the hope of glory. There is no Christian beginning which is merely a beginning. The faith by which we receive Him is not exhausted in a single act, for if we read of it that, through faith, men subdued kingdoms, we also read, nearer our own level, that by faith they obtained the promises and out of weakness were made strong. That is a clear note of our Master's working who does not quench the smouldering wick. "Out of weakness they were made strong," for Christ in a man is the hope of something great in character.

Take it of *immortality*. Harriet Martineau, in her old age, said she had seen enough of herself, and had no wish to have herself living on for ever; and that quaint utterance is not without its echoes round about us. Men who have nothing much to live for may well ask why they should continue when mountains waste and worlds are growing cold. It was at that point of giving life a meaning that the Old Testament faith grew near to perfectness. A man found himself in fellowship with God, who treated him as friend and made his cup run over, and the sense of that friendship was so wonderful that he felt as if he could never come to the end of it. "My heart is glad," said one, "and my tongue sings, for Thou wilt not leave my life to the grave, Thou wilt not suffer a man whom Thou lovest to see corruption." What think you of that as a reason for faith in immortality? Some people think of eternity only as an indefinitely protracted time—millions and millions of years, and still no end; but eternity is far deeper

than time. Christ's own word is, "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God." To know God, to realise that He is everything to you and that you are as much to Him as if He had no other object of His care—that is no mere sensation of a moment, it is a timeless thing; and that is given to you in the very hour at which you yield your heart to Him. "He that believes on Me," said Jesus, "though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he who lives and believes shall never die. Believest thou this?" It is a great thing to receive Christ.

Take it of the *world*, which lies about us an infinite mass of suspicion and resistance; what promise is there for that? Paul's answer is, "As we ourselves have obtained mercy we do not lose heart." I too, he would say, was a mere blind mass of obstruction; all the beauty of Jesus Christ was hidden from my sight. "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee"—as little able to discern moral loveliness as a dumb creature. And He mastered me. God, who said at the first, "Let light shine out of darkness, shined in my heart," and the whole spectacle of existence was changed for me, so I must not doubt, I dare not doubt. Christ is in you, working for order, quiet, sweetness, consolation, and by all the experience which you have of His power, your confidence for the world must increase. A Christian man carries in himself a perpetual light of hope for the world. He is discouraged in his efforts to do good, which are broken by the ignorance and shiftiness and disloyalty of men;

he sees what makes him burn in clean anger. But turning back into his heart, he finds there a patience to rebuke him, a forgiveness which never tires, and a power which will not finally be turned aside. Paul has taught us that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," but his hope was "according to the power that worketh in us." That made him steadfast in his hope. And if Christ is known in our hearts, the Redeemer and the Conqueror of men, we must be prepared for endlessly great things; for Christ, in His coming, does mean something great for everybody.

WHAT JESUS BECOMES TO A MAN WHO HAS KNOWN HIM LONG.

"I turned to see the voice which spake with me, and, having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks, and, in the midst of them, One like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace, and His voice as the voice of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars, and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead."—Rev. i. 12–17.

IF we take this description as coming from a friend of Jesus we might well be disappointed, for it bears hardly a trace of the familiarity of a man who reports what his eyes have seen. Instead of a portrait we have an accumulation of symbols, which hint at the feeling which Jesus now inspired. That is a tendency which runs throughout the New Testament, inclining men to make always less of what is personal and human and more of what is eternal. Jude had grown with Jesus in the home at Nazareth, but he claims no authority on that score, and when he writes it is not

as brother, but as "the slave of the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul, who fixedly believed that, with his eyes, he had seen the Lord, declares, "If I have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth I know Him thus no more." And John (if this book is indeed the Apostle's), who was nearest to His heart of them all, does not recall the tender intimacy of the earthly relation, but falls before the divine majesty and separateness of Him who is the First and the Last. Such a movement of heart is full of admonition, and specially in our time when so much is done by the heaping together of picturesque, historical detail to help our understanding of the Lord. That may be good so far as it goes; but in the light of the New Testament we cannot claim that it takes us far in the understanding of the mystery of the Son of God.

I wish to speak, then, of Jesus Christ as He appeared after many years in the minds of those who loved Him.

1. The dress is changed, and symbol is heaped on symbol to convey the feeling of a man in the presence of his Lord, and yet we must not fail to recognise, at the centre of it all, a human figure. No passage of years and no deepening in knowledge could take from out the Church's heart the man Christ Jesus. "I saw One like a son of man," says John. Half concealed in the blaze of light was a nature of kin to his own; and, amongst traits of description which are purely symbolic, one guesses at notes of a remembered likeness. The eyes which search, and the words which cut, and the

voice which commands may well belong to the range of reminiscence in the Church.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire." "When He was in Jerusalem," writes the Evangelist, "at the passover, many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." Jesus was careful for Himself to disown omniscience, but from His true eyes there was little concealed. He penetrated the best made mask, and spoke to the man who was hiding behind it. He divined needs and movements in others which were still unknown even to the men themselves, and spoke of secrets which men fancied buried out of sight. From all whom He met He required a perfect frankness first; and as they glossed and shaped their phrases, He made them feel that their thoughts were an outspread book to Him. "He told me all things that ever I did," said a Samaritan woman, and that gives character to His intercourse with men, for "His eyes are like a flame of fire."

"And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword;"—that may seem out of place in a description of Him who said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," who said, "Blessed are ye that mourn;" and yet there is no real inconsistency, for none could hear Him speak without knowing the sudden trenchancy of His words. To John himself, when he wished to call down fire from heaven upon

some inhospitable villagers, Jesus said abruptly, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of," a saying which cut to the bone. And the hot spirit of the brothers was sobered by the nickname which their Master fastened on them—"Our sons of thunder." It is an admirable example of the fine art of conveying a censure under cover of a smile, and it must often have brought a blush to their faces; their quick temper and readiness to take offence, their impatience of delay or opposition, their persuasion that the loudest word carries farthest and lives longest—it was exposed in its childish folly by the one poignant phrase.

Many were His words of grace, but something more than kindness must be present in the words of a man who is to help his fellows. Men need kindness, but perhaps they need truth more; and he who has not truth within him, and cannot, on occasion, say the word that hurts, has little lasting gift. "A man who does not know rigour," says Carlyle, "cannot pity either. His very pity will be cowardly, egotistic—sentimentality or little better." John had seen his Lord with lifted hand in the Temple courts; he had often heard Him speak with passion, hot like fire, of those who made goodness harder for the weak; and he had seen how men, cut to the heart, came back to Him who smote for healing. And thus when he wrote of his Lord's speaking, he set first the *power* of the word, as if to say, You have not heard Him speak, if you do not know how His words can cut and wound. So great an instrument as speech was not brought into being for

the utterance of smooth things; and speech which has not love and truth enough in it to hurt sometimes, speech which is not fit to be a weapon, is like sounding brass and a clanging cymbal. And our Lord employed the instrument for every noble end.

"And His voice was as the sound of many waters." That needs no comment. The voice which commands but is not loud, which fills the ear and seems to fill the world, so that other sounds are heard with this as background and accompaniment, and which lingers in the ear when you have left it behind—that is the sound of my Master's voice, says John, who had learned to raise even the human qualities he had known in Jesus to a higher level. A great Jewess said of Goethe, "All other men I love with my own strength, but he teaches me to love with his;" and something of the same kind might be said of John and Jesus, for the Lord gave to the disciple a great heart, which dignified even the small things in his Master's life. And we too must ask Jesus for love to love Him with, that so we may do justice to the transcendent things we daily find in Him.

2. But above and around these old familiar traits, there is in John's representation of his Lord the dazzling radiance which is clearly of God. This earth on which we move about so freely and on which we make our home, would be intolerable but for its concealments. The sun which is our glory and our life would be destruction to us were it not for the veils of vapour which are spread imperceptibly between us and

it, and which dim its brightness; and beyond these, we hide in the shadow of roof and tree, so that we live by the light which we could not bear. And in the deeper world, in which our spirits have their home, it is not otherwise; for there too we need to give thanks for the ignorance which screens us from the blinding reality. We know in part, but sometimes the part is better than the whole, at least it is better for us. It was not wholly a craven spirit which led men in Old Testament times to reckon that they might not see God's face and live, for our God is a consuming fire. Throughout history there has been a growing revelation of God to men, but that has advanced by ways of accommodation, as God has suited His revelation to the human faculties. Jesus Christ shows us God—a God who may be looked upon and understood, and whose fellowship is not a terror even to the weakest; but what the weakest sees in Him is not the whole of God, and what he sees to-day is not the end or limit of his seeing. The child who knew Jesus first in Nazareth as a friend with whom he was sure of welcome had much beyond that to learn of Him, though the knowledge was true so far as it went; and John, who lay on His breast at supper and heard His talk, made progress from that day to this other, when he fell at Christ's feet as dead. As he grew older, his awe in presence of the Lord did not diminish. All that he had ever seen in Christ, he saw still; but as years passed over him he got a deeper sense of the mystery of Christ's nature, and was more ready to cry with Peter, "Depart from

me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It was not a different Christ, but a Christ known better; not a Christ without pity, but One whose pity was so deep as to seem awful. He could not now be merely Companion, Consoler, Teacher; to John's heart He had become Lord and God. "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."

That man has poorly used the chances of his life to whom in old age Christ is altogether plain. To the mind He is always a mystery, standing among us as One whom we know not; and to the heart, conscious of its debt to Him, He rises into the immeasurable as time moves on, His love passing knowledge. As we learn more of our own evil and what He has saved us from, as we come to clearer sight of His objects and what He is raising us towards, as we search with better faith the meaning of the death He died, we ought to know more of the love which passeth knowledge. He who is the Highest has indeed called us friends; but if we have wisdom like the Apostle's, we shall not be quick to call ourselves His friends,—His servants rather, whose joy it is to serve. For in His magnificence there is much more than terror and rebuke, there is gladness also; and the whole world, in which Christ has found a place, grows splendid. The poorest creature under heaven is looked on with a kind of reverence, since for him Christ died. There is no spot upon the earth which Christ redeemed, which is not full of hope; there is no sorrow which may not, in such a world, turn into the beginning of a surer joy;

there is no sin without its grace of pardon there; and no character, however faulty, which has not in Him a promise of perfection. For Christ's radiance makes all things else look radiant.

3. But choosing now from out this mass of symbol, let me speak of the sign of His antiquity. "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." Through these admonitory years it had become clear to John that when his Lord was born in Bethlehem He was not really a new-comer in the world. One Evangelist records a saying of Christ's own, "Before Abraham was, I am;" and in a letter the same writer is content to speak of the Lord as "He that was from the beginning." Our author here looked back through history, and could find no period at which Christ was not. Especially in the history of salvation in Israel no chapter was intelligible to him without the participation in it of Jesus Christ. He found both prophet and poet talking of the Deliverer; and it seemed to him that they spoke not of what was to be but of One who already was. In faith it was given to them to see the Lord, and they joyfully reported to their fellows of Him, whom every eye should one day see. Peter, going farther yet, says that it was the Spirit of Christ which spoke in the prophets, and he seems again to say that it was Christ in spirit who preached in Noah to a world all gone astray. Thus the Apostles read their sacred history back to the beginning, and the hero of every section of it was the same. Jesus Christ was not one in a line of prophets, He was *the* Prophet; and a

man rose out of the unmarked crowd to be a prophet just as he had something of Christ in him. Christ's great heart made men's hearts big; Christ's love of men strove with them from of old, and endured for them, and compelled them to submit. In this Book of Revelation it is daringly said, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy;" that is to say, the witness which Jesus bears is the substance of all the prophecies. For wherever a man had loved and hoped and suffered for men, wherever he had laboured to win men back to trust in God, there the Apostles hastened to do homage to their Lord manifested in the flesh.

That is what John hints at when he presents Christ not as in the flower of His age, but with head and hair as white as snow, for Jesus Christ is He who is from the beginning. With the race of men there rose into activity the Saviour of men, and history has all been engaged with the hidden and the public operations of the love of Christ. In a book of Victor Hugo's, Marat, who seemed the embodied spirit of hate in the Revolution, exclaims to his companions, "Ah, you are young! How old art thou, Danton? only four-and-thirty; and you, Robespierre, are but thirty-three. And I—have lived always: I am the old, human suffering. I have lived six thousand years." When John met Jesus first and heard His call, it came from a man of his own age, of whose birth and progress he knew everything, but as he grew older he was less sure. Now he was ninety years old, perhaps, but how old was his Master? As old as the eternal love of God. There

was no day in all the past in which his Lord did not seem to him at work. "His head and His hair were as white as snow."

There is for everyone a temptation to treat Christ as a mere incident in human history, a voice which sounded out its challenge, and wrought its own result, and fell again to silence. That life so often seems divided from us by an ocean-breadth of years, and Jesus Christ, from that other world of time and men, can scarcely rule our hearts. But if we learn to think with John, we shall never look on Jesus as a mere incident, one of the innumerable waves on the sea of human life, sinking as it rose. Jesus Christ is as old as the saving love of God, as actual and as enduring as that, as near to our life to-day as that. And the same Jesus who called John from his fishing out to nobler tasks, and took Matthew from the toll-house, and Simon from his plots of violence, lays hand on some of us, calling us away. In movements of disquiet, in stirrings of heroic faith, in quickenings of love for higher things, He bids us follow. Blessed is that man who hears His voice, and goes, like John, to know through all the moving years the increase of the love of Jesus Christ!

4. And, lastly, of the universality of Jesus. "In His right hand were seven stars."

In this book John maintains the wholly natural distinction of the public and the secret life of a Church, its visible existence and its essential character; and for these two he finds appropriate symbols—a lamp for

the one, shining on earth's level, and for the other a star. And here he declares that the character or soul of all the Churches is sustained by Jesus Christ. Without Him they have no abiding, their light would soon be blotted, their places empty; and none can deny the right of others, since He holds them all.

A man at first discovers what Christ is to himself, and reading all religious life in the light of his own experience, he is tempted to suspect any experience of a different sort. To him there is one way of being a Christian. But as he lives with his Lord, he is forced to learn two things. He sees how tardy is his own advance in character, and thus he feels that it is not safe to measure the truth of a doctrine by the conduct and the progress of those who hold it. And on the other hand he recognises beauty of life and loyalty of service in men who differ from himself, and he is constrained to see that Christ is working in them also. For Christ upholds not the single star, but all the seven.

That teaches something more than toleration, though that should not be missed; it makes for deepening. For when I know my Lord only in my own way, as He is presented in the services of a particular Church, I know only a part of what He is, and I may move on through life with vices of character unrebuked, which that ministry does not touch. But Christ, who is the Lord of all the Churches, and from whom they take their several and distinctive virtues, is greater far than

any. He has many gifts for me—gifts to my heart, my character, my intellect. And, for His sake, I will humble myself to learn from men who differ widely from me. I will envy them the gifts that Christ has wrought in them, and will covet earnestly to make these gifts my own. I will not surely exclude them from my affection because we differ widely, but rather I will praise His Name, who has called and who sustains us both.

That is something of what John, after so many years, found in his Master—the old manhood dear ever to his heart, but, along with it, a radiance of divine majesty, a new sense of His eternity and of the variety of His gift to human souls. Is Christ, as the years pass, growing more amazing for you? Are heart and mind more fully satisfied, and charity and patience still increasing? It is a question we should study well, for it measures the improvement of our life.

DESIRE AND CONTENTMENT.

"And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come, and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely."—Rev. xxii. 17.

HERE we have a discovery of the mind of a Church which has seen what Jesus Christ is like. The verses in this passage are loosely linked together, but I do not think it is merely fanciful to see in this verse a kind of sequel or response to that which goes before. Whenever Jesus Christ declares His Name to His people, making His greatness known, their hearts will still go out in longing that the world should know Him; when they see Him as the morning star they will have thought of the day which it precedes. And John tells us that in its kindled moods, when sight was clearest, the Church said, Come! People had the wisdom and the courage in those days to believe that in their lowly gatherings the voice of God was sometimes heard. When plain men spoke above themselves, in words all depth and fire and essential insight, speaking so as to catch their fellows up to God, it was reverently confessed that the Spirit of

God was speaking; and on the lips of these men who, for the moment, had the inspired utterance the recurring word was, Come, Lord Jesus! And the Bride, the Church, the true Church of which living men are born, and by which strong sons of God are nursed, her heart was with the prophets as they spoke. We all know, to our sorrow, that in every Christian community there is a part which does not count; it has no voice, no prayer of its own, because it has no sense of high things. But in every Church there is also a soul, a leaven of those who pray, and it is that inner Church which has a character and an utterance. There the deep things of God are understood and cherished; from there the powers proceed which constrain even secular men to believe in God and goodness yet; and there the hopes are kept alive which God has given to His own. And in the heart of that secret Church of the godly, John says there lived and burned this strong desire for the glorious manifestation of the Son of God. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!"

But the heart of a Church which has seen its Lord has something more than longing, it has contentment; and whilst men cry, Come, Lord, as those who have much to hope for, they can also say to the multitude of the thirsty, Come where we are, and drink, and be content as we! That desire and this contentment live together in the heart which has seen its Lord.

1. A man who has seen Christ will always have a noble desire for Christ's coming; a *noble* desire, I say, for much talk of the Second Advent proceeds from

nothing better than peevishness and contempt for things as they are. The world grows worse and worse, men say; error invades, and faith declines, and love grows cold; old customs alter, giving place to baser ones: Come, Lord, before the powers of good are spent; come, Lord, and end it all! That is a common humour which has widely infected preaching and hymns, but it is a supremely ungodly humour. And those who have deeply seen what Jesus Christ is, will look with very different eyes on the world for which He gave Himself, and in which He found delight; to them it will always be not a desert but a world of rich and noble things. Remember, it was He who made all things, and there is something of Himself in all. And the more frankly we rejoice in what is glad and good about us, the more will our hearts grow big with the sense of the things which He keeps in reserve. "If God's mercy is so great that it teaches and heals us, even when He hides Himself, what brightness must we look for when, at last, His face shall be unveiled?" The pleasures of life which bring us joy by the way, the faces of children, and the beauty of the earth, and the goodness of friendship, they are all like sacraments, good in themselves but signalling assurance of Him who makes them good. There is a sense in which every bush burns with God, as the bush of Moses did, and every consolation that reaches us in our hard days and every bit of bread we eat is a ministry of the love of Christ. Thus it is not in any spirit of disdain that we say, Come, Lord Jesus!

it is because, finding all things good since He is in them, we have come in sight of the possibility of better things. The goodness which we enjoy, these simple pleasures, these strong affections, the world's wonders and kindness, should talk to us of a goodness which is on its way.

True men are all conscious of touches of fear as they think of Christ's coming, since it speaks of judgment. In the human heart there is set up already a court of high review, at which the pleas that pass with men are set aside, and each man is seen nakedly in quality as he is; and the thought that, outside of us, there is another tribunal where all the work and worth of life are judged, the thought that this life of ours lived in shadow, where nothing has been seen in clearness, and faults have passed in masquerade like virtues, will one day be searched with a light above the brightness of the sun, the thought that we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and that there are exclusions there and sentences irreversible is fit to strike the mind with awe. "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge." How dare a man, compact of frailty through and through, lift up his face and say, Come, Lord Jesus! when that lies in the coming?

But if you have rightly seen your Lord, the answer to that challenge is not hard, for you have looked on One with such a heart for your concerns that He gave Himself up to share your lot. He saw the human impotence, and the giant power of evil things. He saw

what evil implied for men, the ruin and the sorrow of it. And He took on Himself pains that were not His, and had a part even in our exclusion, in order that upon us might come that which is not ours by right. There is something there to touch the heart and move our love in answer; and John says that when we love God there is an end of fear even of the Great Day. "Love is made perfect with us," he says, "that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment." Whilst Paul cries, "Who is he that condemneth, when it is Christ that died?" If you have ever truly seen the Lord, you will understand Paul's emphasis, "it is *Christ* that died,"—a great death, which brought about a wide, wide redemption, in which there is room for a whole world of men. It belongs to the Christian temper to be able, with all consciousness of fault and yet without fear, to say, Come, Lord, and come soon!

But you must not miss the fact that what engaged the prophets and the Church was not anything about themselves, even their own safety in the Day of Judgment, but something in their Lord. They had seen the King in His beauty, and they wished the world to see; and indeed a man who knows what Jesus is can have no higher wish than that all should know. As soon as he has learned to pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name," and the depth and the splendour of the Name has opened up to him, he is ready to pray further, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," for such a God has every right to be King. Here is the

utterance of a great soul telling how first he saw the King: "I was walking on the Sabbath evening in the same place where I was brought to see myself lost and helpless. I was attempting to pray, but found no heart to engage in that or any duty. But as I was walking very stupid and senseless, in a dark, thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing; but it was a new inward apprehension that I had of God such as I never had before. . . . I stood still and wondered and admired. . . . My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable to see *such* a God, and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that He should be God over all for ever and ever."

"I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that He should be God over all for ever and ever;" that is the mood in which the Church cries, Come, Lord Jesus! that those who have never seen, and those who have misjudged and refused—ay, that those who pierced Him may see. It is the prayer of a great heart.

And if you have seen your Lord, you will not be in doubt that He *can* come in His power and that nothing is able to withstand Him, though I do not imagine that you will greatly care how He is to come. The forecasts in the New Testament and elsewhere as to that have very little for the heart. The great thing is that we should believe enough in the Christian powers of truth and love and sacrifice to be able to

look for it, because the victory when it comes will arrive in that way, by the working of these quiet powers. It will not be a mere theatrical change of scene, the blast of a trumpet and the drawing back of a curtain, it will be the victory of the heart of Christ. To many within the Church that promise of the end is nothing better than a fairy tale. They may talk of it, but the prospect is unreal, because the powers by which it comes about are unreal. In their world the strong things are self-assertion and self-interest; these they understand, and as to the possibility of making way through use of these, they raise no question. With such thoughts holding the mind, the victory of Christ is inconceivable. But as soon as He has spoken home to any heart, saying, "I am the bright, the morning star," that man begins to live in the gladness of a new day, with the limitations of the old removed, since other energies are now at work. "As we obtained mercy," says Paul, "we do not lose heart," and to any man who has seen Jesus it will seem at all times credible and even necessary that He is going to take His power and reign. How soon that end may come or by what stages, a wise man will not ask. Only there are elements of surprise and abruptness in Christ's working every day, and it may well be that the end, when it comes, will seem to come suddenly.

Why is it that so few men pray for this? John, hinting at the infection of desire, says, "Let him that heareth say, Come." Not all the Lord's people are

prophets, not all within the Church are sharers in its hope, but there ought to be a process of infection by which the outsider in these matters begins to be interested at second hand, as it were, interested not in the object itself but, at least, in his neighbour's interest. Many come by that way to the knowledge of Christ. On Stephen's face Paul saw a light which should not have been there if the Sanhedrin's view of the martyr were the true one; but "light there was from far-off fountains" hid from Paul, making death itself a new and radiant thing. That caught Paul's eye and fretted his sense of what was fitting, but it also set him questioning, and one day he discovered the source of that strange brightness, and it seemed to him like the first day of creation, as fresh and startling as if a man had never looked on light before. That is how ideas move. They are like the seeds of plants meant for the wind to bear, scattering themselves by suggestion, not by direct instruction. There are eyes that look in the Church, and ears that listen; and the power and the awe of great, sincere desires are felt by many who are not yet Christians in the deeper sense. A Church which comes to meet them half-way, on a footing of familiarity and lightness, has little power with men; but those who grow up in an atmosphere of noble longings are silently constrained to set amongst the objects of their own desire something of the same order. Though they cannot yet say, Come, they envy those who can; and thus they are drawn by admiration nearer to the Christian temper.

2. It is not necessary to dwell so long on the contentment which is the other element in the temper of a man who has been seeing Christ.

We all know that in the Christian life there is aspiration and desire, but we do not make sufficient allowance for the other element of possession, which yet confronts us in our Shorter Catechism. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to *enjoy* Him for ever." To enjoy God — that is within the possibilities of a human life. Lessing, in a famous passage, says, "If God offered me, in His right hand, truth, and in His left, the continual search for truth, and bade me choose, I would fall before Him and ask for what His left hand contained, saying, Truth itself is for God only." That has a fine air of athleticism which appeals to certain moods, but life is hard, and victory depends not on what we hope for but on what we have. A Christian man knows that there is more in Christ than his need has called out, or his faith has dared to ask for; but that does not mean that he has not received Christ or known His love. His experience of Jesus Christ may seem to many a very small affair, but to himself it will always be the greatest event his life can promise. And thus the prophets and the godly folk to whom no voice was given, whilst hoping for Christ's advent, knew that already they had received the end of their faith. Their life, as others saw it, was sordid enough, with contempt to bear and frequent insecurity, but inwardly it was inhabited by such peace that they were not ashamed to call on men of every rank to taste the good

which they had found. So they joined in saying, "Let him that is athirst come."

Within the New Testament we have two descriptions of the Christian community at Rome which, by their daring contrast, point a lesson. When Paul reached the capital, the Jews met him with the word, "As for this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against;" that was all the world saw. But Paul, writing to that Church, had said, "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints;" and I think a people of whom such words could be written might well endure some little evil speaking.

These people whom John knew were bold to invite all whom the world had left thirsting to try the secret which had brought rest to them. We were thirsty too, they could say; life was hard, masters were capricious, sickness and death were pressing, and nothing seemed to contain a remedy, and when we heard of this Jesus we were incredulous, for life had been rich in disappointment. But we came and drank, and it was *water of life*, refreshing, reviving, giving life a new quality, and love a new tenderness, and the future a light of promise. It was water of life, and we took it *freely*. We had no price in our hands to purchase what belonged to privilege, we had no virtue to make a title for us; and the price did not confront us later, when the pleasure was spent and gone. The blessing was given freely.

It is well to remember that these were poor people of whom John spoke, who knew that God does not take every hardness away from the lot of His friends.

The desert still has to be traversed, but He suffers them to drink of a spiritual Rock which follows them, and that Rock is Christ. It is worthy of note that the words in which John describes the condition of the blessed who have reached home are borrowed from a passage in which Isaiah describes the good estate of those who make their pilgrimage with God as guide. "They shall not hunger nor thirst," says the prophet, "neither shall the heat nor the sun smite them; for He that hath mercy upon them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them." The desert, it seems, is not intolerable if only God is leader and companion. When Paul, tortured and ashamed by illness, asked for its removal, he got as answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and with that he abode content.

There is much for us all to learn in that direction, to cease from discontent, to disengage the good from all encumbering evil, and to magnify day by day our extraordinary mercies. The spiritual drink comes from the Spiritual Rock, says Paul, on which Bengel's comment is, "Qualis Petra, talis aqua," what the Rock is in quality that also is the water which comes from it. So when you gaze on Christ and realize what He is, you may be well assured that from Him no mean or meagre gift can come, but one which will give life and death another look. It is thus that the mind of a Christian man is held in rest and in strong desire. Rejoicing in what he already has, he looks on to greater manifestations of the power and brightness and wonder of the heart of Jesus Christ.

"THE SEA GROWS ALWAYS GREATER."

"The things wherein thou hast seen Me and the things wherein I will appear to thee."—Acts xxvi. 16.

"TO this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a servant and a witness both of the things in which thou hast seen Me and of the things wherein I shall yet appear to thee." In looking back upon his earliest sight of Christ, Paul felt that it had somehow opened a door in him for visions and discoveries coming after. In itself it was very great, but it was not everything. He had seen the Lord, but he had seen Him in such a way as to be sure of seeing Him again; for a Lord of that grace and fulness could not be content to appear for a moment and then to vanish as if He had only one thing to say. And thus a sight of Jesus Christ, which might have seemed enough for a man's whole existence, left this man looking steadfastly for something new, and in all his schemes of thought and teaching he kept a place for the things in which Jesus would yet show Himself to him.

1. That suggests surely that a man's experience of God ought to grow. God never concentrates all He

has to say in any single episode, however rich in meaning that may be.

Paul had brooded hotly over the unreasoning doggedness of these Nazarenes, who, against the judgment of the wise, had set up in their hearts as Master, One whose career had ended with the disgrace of crucifixion. But now this same Jesus was revealed in a splendour which robbed the Cross of any suggestion of defeat, and which cast the shadow of discredit back upon those who had sought to degrade Him. And it was not only victory which he saw, but the revelation of a character; for Jesus that day had come down as the defender of His folk in Damascus, a people few and frail, but lying so near to Him that all blows struck at them found out His heart, and that, on the other hand, all majesty and strength that were His were theirs also. That was a tremendous discovery, which changed the face of everything for Paul. It gave him another God—a God not so much making righteous demands on men as coming to their help, a God not of law but of grace. Here truly are the things that angels desire to look into, why should he wish for more? Was it not enough that he had seen, and that now, for all his days, he might remember?

Well, for one thing, the revelation was of God; and once a man has come where God is, he discovers himself in a region in which there is no end to amazement. A small man wrestles and contorts himself to do what, after all, is inconsiderable work; but from the man of spacious nature great things come with a certain

splendid ease. You may admire his work, but you are scarcely astonished by it; for though it is great yet everything about him is of the same sort, and you take it as of course. It is matter of daily experience that, when a man meets a casual call magnificently, we do not conclude that that is all we shall get from him. In the one achievement we guess at the size of his nature, and we anticipate that, through the vicissitudes of national affairs, in the dim days to come, he will play a great man's part. And it is surely less than reason, when we have seen any working of God, so quickly to draw the line and to say, We have had our experience, and now we must remember it, and live upon it. In this case also, through the work we should guess at the greatness of the Worker, at depth, and radiance, and tenderness beyond our sense as yet, which it has not entered into the heart of the wisest even to conceive, and which only the future can disclose. Just because He is alive, and because He is so great, He is sure to illuminate to-morrow and all the coming days with works which are worthy of Himself. If even a man cannot be seen, in the whole of him, in any single act or period, much more must God, in whose image men were made, move on from event to event in order to convey to our slow minds the assurance of the fulness of His life. At every point of that solemn process a man may be filled with amazement, and yet at every point he will also be drawn out in expectation of something greater yet.

When God spoke to Israel, the revelation was

outspread over the changing history of a nation through fifteen hundred years. "Abraham saw Him and was glad;" but if men had halted with Abraham, content to see no more of God, how ill the world would have known its King! And the revelation still moves from age to age, not that new thoughts come so much as fresh thoughts, words which are to-day's message and not of some far-off yesterday. "I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four," says Walt Whitman, "and each moment of each hour; I find letters from God dropped in the streets, and every one is signed by God's name, and I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go others will punctually come for ever and ever." God is a living God, who comforts, as John Owen says, not with words but with things; so no chapter of experience is barren, and no year is without its voice.

And as the revelation comes from the living God, so it is addressed to man, who is a growing creature. We never continue even for a year at one point. Something in us withers, whilst other needs and tendencies expand; and, moving away from ourselves, we look across, after a while, with a sense of estrangement, to the creature we used to be. That person so hot about things I care nothing for, so zealous in defence of friends whom I dislike, so greedy for pleasures which weary me—that person, somehow or other, was myself; only, for better or worse, I am now translated, and am not the man I was. As circumstances change, new needs assert themselves, and I am driven to lay hold of

other powers of good or evil in the world; I look with other eyes and ask for other rewards, and if I am living on the message of yesterday, it cannot be to me what it was, for I am different.

That does not mean in the least that what I found in God is not great and the greatest; only if I have learned nothing more, that first lesson is remoter than it was, less apt and overwhelming. Mozart said of a piece of music that "the best of all is to hear it all at once," by which I suppose he meant that when one listens to a second bar the first has not gone, but occupies the mind and finds its development and completeness in what comes after. The music does not reside in the individual notes and movements, but in their combination, as every part helps every other—anticipating, balancing, supplementing. That is how wise men treat their discoveries of God; nothing is lost, but nothing is final. Each experience is pure, high, blessed, but there is something behind and something in front, a vision to recall and a vision to anticipate, and "the best of all is to hear it all at once." It is a poor account of a growing creature that he knows nothing more of God than he did at the beginning. "Who, if he is honest with himself," said Max Müller, "could say that the religion of his manhood was the same as that of his childhood, or the religion of his old age the same as the religion of his manhood? It is easy to deceive ourselves and say that the most perfect faith is a childlike faith. But before we can learn that, we have to learn to put away

childish things. There is the same glow about the setting sun as there is about the rising; but there lies between the two a whole world, a journey through the whole sky and over the whole earth." We ought not to content ourselves with even the most bountiful and marvellous revelations of the door, for there are revelations of the way.

2. Nothing helps this growth like expectation. Many people, like old-fashioned connoisseurs strolling from city to city and from shop to shop in search of treasures, pass from preacher to preacher and from book to book, fastening upon new ideas as they go, and dropping them to catch at others; I am not sure that they grow rich in the course of their pilgrimage. But others have no better prosperity who abide where life has set them, like stones squatting in the river's bed, overflowed only in times of highest spate. In every Church there are men and women who, at some time of revival, have been submerged, when the realities of God broke over them, and they had thought for nothing else; and whenever a revival preacher comes, they go to hear him, and they sit wondering if this time the water will rise about them again, and give them the sense of the rush and the power of the full stream. That is one of the melancholy spectacles of every attempted awakening—the number of old converts who come, hoping that the renewal of the outward circumstances will restore the inward experience. They have not been keeping themselves in the love of God, in health and exercise and obedience, but they hope that the crowd

and the stir and the hymns will do it for them. That, certainly, is not the hopeful way to progress.

Nothing is more needful than continuous expectation. The mind which is conscious that the world is unexhausted will not fail to see marvels, for each man makes his own world. The artist bears about with him a faculty of appreciation which is the key to a hundred secret chambers of delight. A child walks along a flat country road in a rich region of romance. A dull man, who has made up his mind on everything, may grumble even at a change in the vocabulary which he has learned to associate with the things of God; but his neighbour who sits beside him, with sense alert and vigilant, knows that the best word ever spoken about God is too dim and faint for the reality. He knows that truth has not yet been taken possession of by anybody, and he watches for new glories coming even to himself. Which of these two, do you think, will see? the merely orthodox who remembers and deplores, or the man of faith who anticipates and desires?

A famous novelist once said, "Give us one little miracle here in Paris, and we shall believe." That "in Paris" has great force, for what would seem miraculous to a scoffing observer? All God's working is marvellous to an awakened soul; but a man makes his own sign and miracle, and of many societies it is true that Jesus can do no mighty works among them because of their unbelief. "A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not, but knowledge is easy to him that hath understanding" (Prov. xiv. 6). The real grace is in

expectation. Matthew Henry says here that "Christ now settled a correspondence with Paul, which He designed afterwards to keep up, and only told him now that he should hear further from Him." I like that homeliness of phrase. There is wisdom in taking Jesus at His word, and when He hints at further revelations of Himself, to look for them as on their way.

Some of us in these days are hindered by perplexities of the intellect. The matters on which they cannot be sure increase, and they forget the things which they know; and perhaps no habit needs more to be cultivated than that of magnifying our certainties. There are things, thank God, which we know, and as we exalt these and live in the power of them, the greater things draw near. "They go from strength to strength," from grace to grace, from vision to vision; and it is an honour which our Lord desires that, whilst in our hearts we do justice to the goodness of what we have, we should be looking for the things which are yet to be revealed, for there is no coming to the end of the love of Jesus Christ.

> "And so the shadows fall apart,
> And so the west winds play,
> And all the windows of my heart
> I open to Thy day."

3. Along with this growth in knowledge there ought to be some corresponding growth in a man's testimony. There are many ways of bearing witness, but in some way a man is bound to make known what has become so marvellous to himself. Some have no words, and

yet their bearing as they go about the common tasks, and their look as they sit in the house of God—eager and happy—are enough to let their fellows guess at the wells from which they have been drinking. The world is greatly in need of preachers of the right sort, through whom their neighbours and friends may be persuaded of God. Everywhere is a vast outspread confusion. Darkness broods upon the face of the deep, and death is never far away, and sin is burdening the lives of men. It is a hard world to live in, and if we have discovered a secret which has changed its face for us, we have an obligation to those who do not know.

But Paul, who often was content, by way of preaching, to tell the story of his own arrest on the Damascus road, felt that he had other words to speak. He was to be a witness of the things wherein his Master would yet appear to him, and thus there is visible in the Epistles a continual growth and movement. There is a message of the door which is never out of date, but new aspects of the grace of Christ are discovered as one lives with Him, and thus the accent changes. Those who wish to help their fellows must always be learning and unlearning. Nothing can be worse than speaking from the memory and not from the heart and from to-day. What helps men most in the distresses of life is not our ideas, however shiningly original, but the immediacy of our contact with the living God; and if we speak as of to-day we can scarcely fail to help, for through us the ever urgent goodwill of the Father will find utterance.

That implies that we must, at all times, be willing to

admit that what we saw or what we said yesterday was less than the whole. Things grow simpler to men who live with God, divisions grow fewer and less important; they deal not so much with clearly defined doctrines as with great masses of fact. "I write unto you, old men," says John, "because ye know Jesus Christ that was from the beginning," for in that he marked the profit of living long. "The sea grows always bigger," said Tintoretto in his old age. There are reaches and remotenesses without end; how shall I ever do justice to that vast expanse? "I bow the knee," says Paul, "and pray that, with all the saints, we may comprehend the length and breadth and depth and height, and that we may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." With all the saints,—for it exceeds the power of the wisest to know, it takes a world of holy men to do justice to the endlessness of the grace of God in Jesus Christ..

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